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How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

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Signature: Date: 8 August 2018

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The important people in this research are the principals who participated in this research, and all those they represent. I hope this representation of their work contributes to a better understanding of their practice and more effective collaboration with them.

Abstract

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

This is the guiding question for the research. Two specific questions guide the research design and inquiry.

1. *What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?*
2. *How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?*

The research methodology for Question 1 is a criteriological inquiry of literature into the nature of schools as systems. It establishes that schools are complex adaptive social systems. The review of school leadership literature concludes that much of that literature does not explicitly consider schools as systems, and unconsciously assumes that school are open complicated systems. This research proposes that these misrepresentations and misunderstandings of the nature of schools as systems have significant consequences for the relevance of the literature and the effective practice of school leadership. The inaccurate assumptions about how schools work as systems are particularly important in a revived exploration of ethical leadership.

The interviews of six principals collected data for Question 2 through semi-structured interviews. The findings were developed through a narrative inquiry approach in which maintaining the voices of each principal was the priority. Findings are presented in two ways. First as individual narratives that present each of the individual voices and secondly through analysis of all the interview data.

The first key finding is that principals act in ways consistent with the nature of complex systems, without explicit awareness of the mental models they are applying. Their practice as principals does not align with much of the school leadership models in the literature. The second key finding is that the principals understand leadership as fundamentally and continually ethical, rather than the common view in the literature that ethics is one dimension of school leadership. Ethical dilemmas are a normal part of school life for them. Their practice of leadership is consistent with the characteristics of complex social systems, rather than the characteristics of complicated social systems generally represented in school

leadership literature. The third finding is that principals understand learning as an ethic of leadership in itself. Learning is a fundamental good in both the processes of leadership and the purposes of leadership.

Implications of the research and recommendations for action are further considered under three headings; ethical leadership, system thinking, and reimaging schools. While the profound ethical purposes of schools are widely acknowledged, the everyday practice of ethical leadership is not adequately supported by research or professional support. Ethical rather than technical choices drive action in schools and that is a fundamental characteristic of complex adaptive systems.

Understanding schools through a lens of complexity may change the way research is done and the nature of policies and standards in ways that more authentically represent what schools really are. The conceptual starting point of schools as ethical complex human systems is an underdeveloped opportunity to re-imagine and more accurately understand both the nature of leadership and what schools have become.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Background to the research

School principalship has become a highly public leadership role at a time of local and globally significant challenges. A crisis of trust in Australian government and non-government agencies and businesses was a theme examined across the media in 2017 and into 2019. For example, news media examined the report of the annual Edelman Trust Barometer. The 2017 report stated that, "set against the backdrop of recent international populist results, including Brexit and Trump, the overwhelming global sense that the system is failing is reflected in the Australian Trust findings" (Spurr, 2017, p. 1). A decreasing level of trust in governments, public institutions and business has been a growing theme over the last few years, partly in response to two royal commissions into some of Australia's significant institutions. The final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was made public in December 2017 and responses to its findings and recommendations continued into 2018. The Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and the Financial Services Industry was established in December 2017 and evidence of misconduct emerged during 2018 as the public hearings began.

Schools and the people who work in them are the local expressions of governments losing the trust of a growing numbers of citizens. Schools are often the formal institutions that citizens engage with most often and at a personal level. There is no evidence that there is a loss of trust directed specifically at schools but "principals and deputy/ assistant principals experience a far higher prevalence of offensive behaviour at work each year than the general population" (Riley, 2018, p. 16). Despite that, local schools continue to be trusted and important focal points for local communities, and vehicles for the implementation of government public policy. Schools are seen as central to the well-being of their local communities and are expected to be part of networks for the provision of a wide range of government and community services. The resulting high levels of expectation and accountability are characterized by public access to information intended to measure school

performance and detailed formal descriptions of principal and teacher professional practice are readily available.

Since 2008, the *My School* website has provided "readily accessible information about the almost 10,000 schools across Australia" and "an information source for parents to make informed decisions about their child's education" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2016, p. 1). Public access to whole of system strategic plans, school plans, and the publication of annual reports, also contributes to formal provision of information. This in turn increases the transparency of school performance and the expectations and accountability that come with the availability of multiple priorities, outcomes and measures. Parents and community members expect immediate informal access to schools in a physical sense and social media, emails, and school websites, increasingly blur the communication boundaries between school, home, and community and school based community activities.

The expansive and public nature of school principalship practice is represented by the Australian Professional Standards for Principals (the Standard), "a public statement setting out what school principals are expected to know, understand and do to succeed in their work" (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers [AITSL], 2015, p. 3). The Standard describes the agreed position of all Australian states and territories and its description of "the crucial role of the principal" may be taken as a considered and representative one. The role is "one of the most exciting and significant undertaken by any person in our society" and principals "embody the power of education to make a difference to the lives of individuals and to society, now and in the future" (p. 6).

Specific descriptions of high-performing principals and a large amount of information about school performance may improve clarity about what good schools and their leadership look like. However, as noted by Cranston and Ehrich (2009), "it is apparent that the complex and changing milieu in which leaders now work is fraught with paradoxes and tensions," (p. viii) and "the roles and responsibilities of school leaders in most countries across the world have become more complex and challenging in recent years" (p.39).

Phillip Halinger, in the foreword to *Successful Principal Leadership in Times of Change*, asserts that we are living in a "transformational period of change" (in Leithwood & Day, 2007, p. viii) and that "international political and economic trends have created a new global context for organisations throughout the world" (p. viii). He describes "pressures to adapt to rapid, unrelenting, externally-driven change" (p. viii) and claims that "today, few institutions of society are experiencing these pressures more profoundly than schools. Yet their response remains halting, and often uncertain" (p. viii).

Contemporary education researchers and writers are dramatic and considered in their descriptions of the place of schools and leaders in this period of such challenges.

> In the beginning of the 21st Century, in the era of wars, terrorism, hurricanes, volcanoes, tornados, financial uncertainty, and high stakes testing, educational leaders are faced with even more daunting decision-making difficulties than in a more tranquil period. Educational leaders now face profound moral decisions in their classrooms and schools…in an ever-changing world…. The most difficult decisions to solve are ethical ones that require dealing with paradoxes and complexities. (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 3).

The people engaged in the work of schooling now act in a new world of government and community expectation to problem solving. In this new world "governments and foundations around the world are devoting unparalleled resources in the development of aspiring [school] leaders" and "it is no coincidence that these efforts are taking place in the face of tremendous pressure for public schools to be more accountable" (Leithwood & Day, 2007 p. 1). Principals are required to be far more than both technical experts in learning and leadership and people committed to addressing important societal issues. The AITSL Standards require them to

> behave with integrity underpinned by moral purpose. They model values and ethical perspective in relation to their own and the school's practice and organisation. They promote democratic values including active citizenship and inclusion (2015, p. 21).

Moral purpose as a fundamental driver for choices and action is commonly included in school leadership literature and professional learning. David Hopkins (2006) places it at the centre of the leadership purpose in his work with Victorian Principals over the last decade. Michael Fullan, another researcher writer and educator highly influential in Australia, identifies “realizing moral purpose” as one of the six steps for a principal to take “to move theory to practice in organisational change” (2010, p. 14).

Consequences of the circumstances in which principals are working are partially captured in an Australian principal occupational health and wellbeing survey run nationally since 2011. The most recent results show that mental health issues associated with staff and students are increasing and causing additional stress, and that not enough is being done to help stressed and overworked school principals cope with the ever-increasing demands of the job. All of these factors have remained high or increased in recent years and sources of increased stress include resourcing needs, student and parent related issues and government initiatives (Riley, 2017).

The professional world of school principals and their colleagues is one of paradox, tensions, competing priorities, moral purposes and profound satisfaction gained through the relationships with, and achievements of, their students. This broad context captures the central themes of this research. The complexity of the system in which the role operates and the ethical dilemmas that are natural to the system are the fundamental themes. They are an expression and an inevitable consequence of “working in a complex, challenging and changing environment, leading and managing the school of today, ever-conscious of the needs of tomorrow” and “able to embrace uncertain, complex and challenging contexts and work with others to seek creative and innovative solutions that support quality outcomes for all” (Leithwood & Day, 2007, p. 1).

The voices of principals as they describe their everyday pragmatic and emotional work will be central in this study. School principals make ethical decisions all day every day (Eyal, Berkovich & Schwartz, 2011). They make some of them in the moment while others make demands on emotion and judgment over time. Some are clear-cut choices easily identified and while the consequences of the choices may be challenging, knowing the right action is the easy part. Other choices are between

right verses right (Badaracco, 2013) and for these the choice is a step in what can be a personally and professionally challenging process. These right verses right choices are the defining moments of particular interest in this study. These moments of choice can be the confluence of a confounding network of priorities, policies, competing special interests, conflicting emotions and unique circumstances. Somewhere in this system is the principal with their own internal sense of self, acting within constructions of professional practice and their beliefs about the operating nature of the system of which they are a part.

Focus, purposes and research questions

In the context of the introductory overview therefore, the overall focus of this study is an exploration of the broad research question:

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

This study pays most attention to two dimensions of this broad question. First, the literature review explores the ways schools as systems are conceptualized and represented in policy and guidelines, leadership literature, and specific ethical leadership literature. The Open Systems Criteria Framework (Table 1) is developed from the review. It is used in the interview data collection and analysis phases. The concepts of complex systems and complicated systems are compared given that 'complex' is a common adjective used in research and commentary and 'complicated' is a fair description of the landscape of policies, guidelines, requirements and leadership research. Second, the literature review explores how the leadership literature addresses the ethical tensions between the principals' professional self and their personal self, and how those tensions may be navigated as school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise out of the complexity that is the school.

Consequently, a major theme for the study across these dimensions is an exploration of the tensions, coherence and incompatibilities created by different conceptualizations of schools as systems, and the potentially competing ethical constructions of, for example, leadership, power, authority and accountability.

Several concepts are introduced in this chapter and early in the literature review as part of the description of the relationships between how schools are understood as systems, and how that understanding influences principals' beliefs about what ethical action is. The interconnections of the nature of schools as systems, principals' understanding of ethical leadership and how they act on ethical dilemmas are explored through the literature review and analysis of the interview data.

An overarching purpose of the study is to identify and describe the range of principals' conceptual understanding of the school as a system in which ethical priorities and dilemmas dominate, and how their professional practice is influenced by those understandings. Given the problematic nature of making generalisations from the limited number of participants (Creswell, 2014), the principal interviews will contribute rich specific examples of the principals' individual narratives. Those voices will contribute to the two key purposes of the study of contributing to the understanding about how principals make ethical choices as part of their everyday leadership practice and exploring ways in which system thinking theory can contribute to understanding the mental models that principals apply in their decision-making. These purposes, some of the challenges presented by them, and the limitations of the study are discussed in more detail in this section and in Chapters 2 Literature review, and 3 Research design and methodology. The focus, purposes and themes of the study are captured in the overall research question, *how do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?*

The research questions are:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): ***What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?***

Research Question 2 (RQ2): ***How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?***

a. ***How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
b. ***How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***
c. ***How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?***

These questions examine issues often invisible in school leadership literature: both the generic leadership, and the more specific ethical leadership literature. They aim to contribute to the understanding of how principals act in the reality of unknowns and competing tensions rather than how ethical leadership literature and employing agency requirements suggest they should.

The questions are investigated in a two stage process. The literature review (Chapter 2) addresses RQ1 through a criteriological inquiry as a key research output that considers the defining criteria of a complex adaptive social system and the extent to which schools can be considered an example. The Open Systems Criteria Framework is developed as part of that and then used as a tool to collect, collate, and analyse the data relevant to RQ2. The framework and the literature review inform the research process for RQ2 and its sub-questions.

The criteriological inquiry investigating RQ1 concludes that while schools are complex adaptive social systems they are usually interpreted and treated in the literature as complicated, technical systems. The literature review also identifies particular ethical positions that are concomitant with both complicated and complex systems and the absence in the literature of much explicit examination of the consequences of the differences. The criteriological inquiry and interview data establish that these competing interpretations need deeper exploration as a basis for better understanding of ethical leadership in the school context.

The narrative inquiry of the interview data concludes that each of the participating principals practice with a pragmatic understanding of schools as complex systems without a conscious awareness of their systems thinking. They believe schools are fundamentally ethical in their purpose and ethical dilemmas are a normal part of leadership choice work.

Justification and significance

Given the pervasive theme of increasing complexity, represented through both the quantity of formal agency expectations of principals and directly described in commentary and literature, it is important to examine specifically the concept of

complexity and the range of interpretations applied in the literature. Within the limitations of the direct work with principals discussed later, this research contributes a conceptual understanding of complexity in schools as systems that offers new insights about how schools work. It also offers a coherent shared view of contemporary principal practice described by the participants.

The significance attributed to ethical behaviour and the centrality of moral purpose in policy, codes of practice, and in leadership literature, appear to be unsupported by research into what makes those ethical beliefs challenging in everyday practice. This study pays attention to how ethical leadership is described and understood in both the general leadership literature and in the ethical school leadership literature in particular. It explores tensions and contradictions in the literature and offers some coherence and clarity that may be of use to principals and those working in that contested environment.

From a theoretical perspective, the study offers a systems thinking approach to understanding and describing the leadership of principals. The nature of schools as systems is rarely examined specifically in education leadership literature, while system thinking assumptions and their associated ethical positions are inevitably applied because of the very nature of schools. “The idea of a complex adaptive living organism of a school has been forgotten in the search for simple solutions to complex problems” (Crawford, 2012, p. 616) and that way of understanding schools demands attention. Steps towards exploration and clarification of the currently pervasive and inadequate assumptions will be of benefit to principals, researchers and senior officers at agency level.

The voices of leaders are increasingly used as examples in applying ethical paradigms in the examination of leadership action (Shapiro & Gross, 2013) but there appears to be a gap in exploring what makes the leadership choices difficult and complex in the pragmatic context of everyday schools. Better understanding of the “issues and dynamics of ethical dilemmas” (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009, p. 39) is a priority for this study, as is the importance of sharing some authentic voices of principals reflecting on their responses from within these dilemmas.

In summary, this study contributes to attempts to balance the expansion of adjectival leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999) by identifying leadership behaviours and mindsets across numerous adjectives (distributed, shared, transformational, ethical, servant, and participative for example) that best fit the living nature of schools as the complex adaptive social systems they are. The paradox that understanding, adopting, and applying complexity as a leadership construct may increase principal efficacy is a thread weaving through this study.

Methodology overview

This section includes a methodological framework summary, a summary of participant characteristics, and a general description of the methodology.

Methodological Framework for Study

Figure 1 outlines the research approach in the study. The researcher conducted the Criteriological Inquiry and the interviews of the six participants. The two interviews for each participant took place over eight weeks with no longer than three weeks between them. The written narratives in Chapter 4 were provided to participants for approval and changes made in response to their feedback.

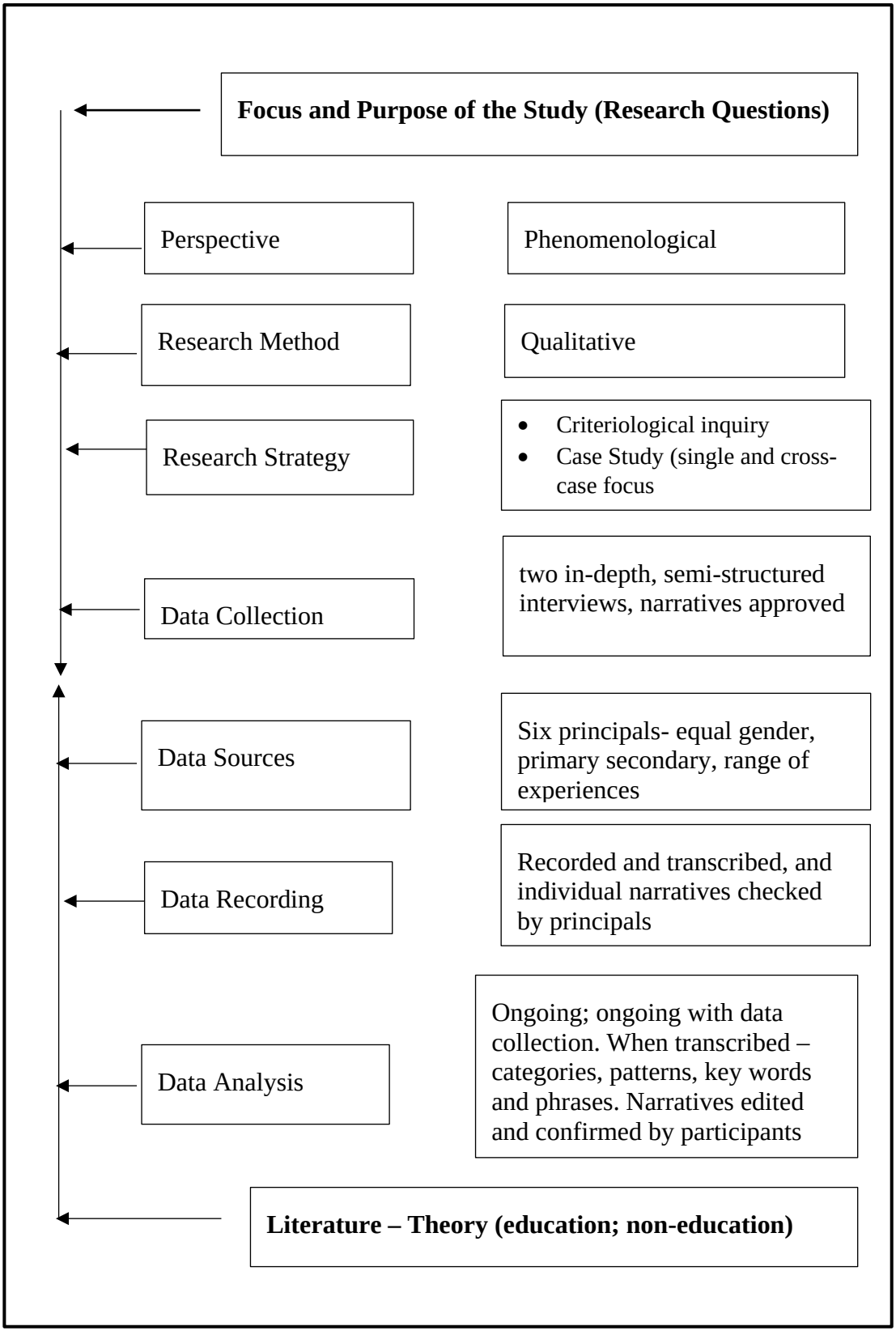

Figure 1. ***Methodological Framework for the Study***

Overview of participating principal characteristics

Six principals of Tasmanian schools participated in the study. There was an equal balance of gender and primary and secondary experience. Experience ranged from two years in a first principalship to a mixture of principalship in more than one school from 10 to 20 years. Country and city schools are represented in their experience. Detailed descriptions of their professional history and their current schools at the time of the study are restricted in order to limit identification, and specific data beyond their own school leadership were not included in the analysis. This is discussed further in *limitations to the study* and *potential for further research*. The Chapter 4 principal narratives provide more details of their leadership contexts. Names used to identify participating principals are pseudonyms.

Principal 1. John has over a decade of principal experience in primary and secondary schools located in city and rural areas of Tasmania.

Principal 2. Cathy has several years of principal experience in a medium size primary school, leadership roles in other schools, and student support roles across schools.

Principal 3. Sally is principal for the first time in a mid-sized high school and is 18 months into the role. She has leadership experience in other schools and out of school roles.

Principal 4. Deb has been principal of a country town primary school for two years. She has school leadership experience in several other primary schools.

Principal 5. Ben is principal of a large high school after about ten years of principalship in a primary school. He has a range of school and out of school leadership roles.

Principal 6. Luke has been the principal of a medium size primary school for several years after several years of principalship in a country town primary school.

This section is an overview of this study's methodology and a full discussion is provided in Chapter 3. The criteriological study of the literature to determine the necessary features of a complex adaptive social system was the foundational part of

the study. The Open Systems Criteria Framework was developed as part of that study and used in the development of research questions and the narrative analysis of data. A two phase in depth semi-structured interview of six principals provides data for individual narrative descriptions and a narrative inquiry analysis of the data set. The research questions, the purposes of the research, and the subject matter best suit a phenomenological approach using a qualitative research method. A qualitative approach based on individual cases of principal thinking about ethical dilemmas and cross-case analysis allows for flexibility guided by emerging themes generated by the interviews. Similarities and differences that emerge during the interview period require a qualitative approach that will allow a constructivist response through variations within the planned question framework and through informal engagement with participants, responsive to their thinking.

The focus on ethical dilemmas strengthens the appropriateness of a qualitative rather than a quantitative or mixed method approach. Exploring the human behaviour identified in research questions is "bound to the context in which it occurs" and that context includes "social reality cannot be reduced to the same manner as physical reality and what is most important…is understanding and portraying the meaning that is constructed by the participants involved" (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson & Walker, 2013, p. 447).

Phenomenological research "describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomena described by the participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). The narratives developed in this project represent what Creswell calls "the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 14). The single principal studies with a cross case focus must, according to Schreiber and Asner-Self (2010) consider the "phenomena" as "observable events that a person experiences rather than intuits", (p. 197) and the approach in this research is to take what the participants say on face value and encourage them to reflect on their interpretations over time. While the phenomenological approach attempts to capture what the participants describe from their point of view "with as few preconceived notions or influences from the researcher as possible" (Schreiber & Asner-Self , 2010, p. 199), the rigour required includes probing for explanations deeper than superficial opinion and habitual labelling.

Definitions and terminology

> In customary usage, when people say ‘complex’ they usually mean ‘complicated’ in the sense of an intricate and detailed interweaving that one might see in a tangled fishing line. In contrast, the technical meaning of complexity does not refer to how complicated organisations are but to the type of interactions that occur between their elements, (Hazy, Goldstein & Lichtenstein, 2007, p. 4).

The interchanging of terms like complex and complicated is an example of the contradictions and confusion common in literature about school leadership and organisation. Examining contradictory understandings and a lack of precision and clarity across a range of key concepts is a major purpose of this study and central to the literature study. Superficial application of terms such as ‘complex’ can infer that ‘complexity’ as a concept is being applied as an analytical tool, when the word is merely being used a synonym for complicated. Turbulence is used as a metaphor by Shapiro and Gross (2013) in the text *Ethical Educational Leadership in Turbulent Times,* for example. The text acknowledges that “finding a solution to a complex ethical problem…is far from easy” (p. x). The metaphor is accurately applied in the book as an example of a complication that can be ‘solved’ rather than, more appropriately, a complex problem beyond a technical solution. The literature review explores this example in more detail.

‘Systems’ and ‘systems thinking’ are foundational concepts in this study. There is a range of legitimate meanings of systems (Sterman, 1994). In the context of this study, the meanings will be located within two parameters. ‘The system’ and ‘system leadership’ (Fullan, 2004; Hopkins, 2006; Hopkins & Higham, 2007) commonly refers to the overarching organisation within which individual schools and people operate. System leadership is the mindset in which leaders see their responsibility beyond their own specific role, a principal for example, and are “willing to shoulder system-wide roles” (Hopkins & Higham, 2007, p. 147). That meaning of system is not the subject of this study.

‘System thinking’ is the mental model of how a system functions that a person applies, consciously or unconsciously, to their problem solving as an agent

within that system. In this context, a system "is any perceived structure whose elements 'hang together' because they continually affect each other over time" (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith & Dutton, 2012, p. 124). The critical differences between complicated and complex open systems and the particular nature of a complex adaptive social system are explored in the literature review. While this is the term developed in this study's criteriological inquiry, the full term is not always used in this thesis. Complex systems, open complex systems and complex adaptive social systems are used interchangeably depending on the relevant emphasis, and the adjectives adaptive and social are similarly used at different times.

'Ethical leadership' and a school's 'moral purpose' are variously defined in literature included in the review, and shared elements appear to have emerged over the last decade or so. For those looking to the literature for guidance, a dilemma is commonly described as a lack of coherence and clarity. The literature review establishes that, while a lack of certainty is a characteristic of complexity, it does not mean that connections and common ground cannot be constructed. The review explores those connections and proposes a network of positions on ethical leadership and moral purpose consistent with the nature and purposes of schools as systems.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to six principals in the south east of Tasmania. Sites and participants were "purposefully selected" in order to "best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Selection included a gender mix, primary and secondary principals and people at different stages of their careers. While the number of participants is small, the in-depth study concentrated on two particular elements of their leadership thinking. It offers a depth of analysis and a range of data sufficient to contribute knowledge in this maturing area of research. The individual narratives about the pragmatics of coming to ethical choices are valuable data resources in themselves.

Selection of participants and interview questions did not consider how factors including gender, academic qualifications, and past professional roles and training may have influenced their responses to ethical dilemmas. The semi-structured nature

of two interviews provided participants with opportunities to note these factors if they considered them to be important, but the guiding questions did not draw attention to them. Participant responses did not provide opportunities for the researcher to invite deeper reflection, including on the influence of philosophers or philosophical concepts. Specific questions on any of these or other factors may have provided useful additional data.

The two interview approach provided an opportunity for a detailed comparative analysis of each participant's shift in understanding. Analysis of the transcriptions identified specific examples of this and these are identified in Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion. The interview questions focussed on guiding participants' perceptions of their responses to ethical dilemmas and further useful research may focus on guided attention about reasons for those perceptions.

The criteriological inquiry into schools as complex adaptive social systems and the Open Systems Criteria Framework are research outputs that stand alone for critique. They contribute a system thinking and ethical practice perspective where there is little in the education leadership literature. Use of the framework and application of the theory of schools as complex adaptive and social systems was treated carefully in the interview phase of the research. The researcher conducting that data gathering phase also conducted the criteriological inquiry and there is a risk that preconceived interpretations of what the participants are contributing could be applied to the data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher's explicit intention is to avoid naturalism and any claim "to gaze into the soul of another" (p. 182) or "depict the 'authentic' voice [I] want to access" (p. 182). Addressing the risk of bias is included in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Overview

The literature review responds to the broad research question:

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

Chapter 2 Part A examines the assumptions about the nature of schools as systems in the ethical leadership literature, the research that addresses the specific question of organisations as systems, and consequences for leadership of that system thinking. It takes the form of a criteriological inquiry that develops the argument that schools are complex adaptive social systems. This criteriological study directly addresses Research Question 1:

What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?

This research question's findings inform responses to each of the other questions and to the research methodology and data analysis. Chapter 2 Part B examines the ways in which the literature describes ethical leadership with a particular focus on ethical school leadership. It provides the opportunity for analysis of the theories and research informing Research Question 2 and its sub-questions.

How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?

- ***a. How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
- ***b. How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***
- ***c. How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?***

In summary, Part A explores systems theory to identify and describe key characteristics of schools as organisational systems and Part B examines ethical theory and practice as represented in educational leadership literature generally, and ethical school leadership literature specifically. Part A is a combination of a literature review and the development of the Open Systems Criteria Framework.

This artificial separation for the sake of analysis is unified by the conclusion that the problem solving work of school leadership requires ethical choices and that this ethical choice work is the normal day to day professional practice of principals, driven by the nature of schools as systems. Both Parts A and B share the overall purposes of exploring gaps, unstated assumptions, and the opportunities for improved clarity about the nature of school principalship. They also explore characteristics of ethical practice that may be compatible with schools as complex adaptive social systems.

Four assertions are the basis of both parts of the literature review. First, the research and theories about ethics and leadership is a maturing field. Interest has grown in the last 30 years or so and it appears that further exploration remains important, although refinement and coherence are emerging around both theory and practice (Branson & Gross, 2014; Duignan, 2015; Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed & Ainscow, 2015; Morrison, 2110; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2010).

This emerging refinement and coherence in the education leadership literature is potentially a cause for concern, examined in detail later in this study. The core concern is that the most prolific writers (Branson, Gross, and Shapiro for example) largely omit or misinterpret complexity theory. In addition, the references cited in writing on education and school leadership usually show little interest in leadership theory and research outside education. There are education writers who directly address the importance and relevance of complexity thinking and they are included in the review.

The second assertion is that the enduring and inevitable complexity and contestability of what it means to be ethical and moral is evident in the history of philosophy and sits at the core of ontology and epistemology. However, this tradition and accumulated knowledge appear little used in contemporary literature. Terms such as ethical, moral purpose, authentic and values driven are readily used in describing leadership but the innumerable and contested choices from which they are derived are rarely acknowledged, with some exceptions (Branson & Gross, 2014; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; MacIntyre, 2007; Rachels, 1995).

The third assertion guiding the literature review and the research is that school leadership, as emotional and personally challenging work within a formal,

organized system of human relationships, is often a matter of choices between right and right (Badaracco, 2013). There is no normative holy grail of check lists or one ethical or moral theory but there does seem to be coalescence around some theories, key concepts, skills and dispositions that assist school leaders to make justifiable, workable, and reasonable choices. A range of professional learning texts and research papers contribute to agreed characteristics that are identified in this literature review and they contribute to the data collection methodology and data analysis.

The nature of school based decision making as unavoidably ethical in a complex adaptive social system is the fourth assertion and it brings together in the literature review the two elements of complexity and ethics. The argument that ethical choices drive decision making in complex systems is a thread weaving throughout this project.

Part A. Leadership in schools as open systems

Part A is a criteriological inquiry into the nature of schools as systems through a review of literature addressing the nature of leadership in human organizations and is an output for this thesis. It is arranged around four broad sections and begins with summaries of several threads of argument woven through the thesis. Foundational concepts of systems and systems thinking, and the distinction between complicated and complex systems are then considered, including a summary of the ways in which complexity as a concept is included in school leadership literature. The next section applies system and complexity concepts to schools and school leadership. An overview of organisational theory compared to complex systems theory as it is applied to education is included. This section also considers the influence on ethical thinking of mental models of schools as systems. The final section explores the ways in which some significant and mainstream educational leadership texts interpret schools as systems and the consequences for ethical leadership.

Threads of thinking through the thesis

The thesis explores evidence that little of the general leadership literature focusing on organizations as systems looks explicitly at schools and it considers the relevance

and transferability of research done in other organizations, hospitals and health care for example (Anderson, Crabtree, Steele & McDaniel, 2005). It also examines significant texts for the ways in which they interpret and apply open systems thinking and their interpretation of open system concepts including coherence, turbulence, distributed leadership, sensemaking and collaboration across a range of texts. There are several threads of argument woven throughout the whole study and criteriological inquiry. They are introduced here.

Leadership is a practice (Heifetz, Grashow & Linksy, 2009; MacIntyre, 2007) as well as a role and the actions of leadership take place in organizations made up of people. The argument explored is that interactions of these people, or agents, follow principles of system theory and all the agents acting in the human system influence how the organization works. Leadership is informal and practiced by many people and leadership is also formal as identified in role descriptions and position titles.

The nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems means that "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973) are the norm and choices informed by ethical judgment are constantly made. Schools therefore are organizations driven by ethical choice work rather than objective conclusions derived from data. The nature of ethical leadership takes a fundamentally important place in understanding leadership effectiveness, once schools are acknowledged as systems that are largely complex and adaptive rather than complicated and technical.

Systems thinking, and systems theory are inherently present in all literature about leadership. Beliefs and assumptions about how people work together within those organizations from a systems theory perspective are usually unconscious and unexamined or they are interpreted through organisational theory (Owens & Valesky, 2015, p.3). It may follow then that the applied systems theory profoundly affects perceptions of school leadership and ethical practice, but the literature demonstrates little awareness of the theory at work or the consequences of its application. This lack of awareness leads to contradictions and gaps. Exploring these provides opportunity for deeper understanding about the nature of leadership and the fundamental role of ethics in decision-making. This study aims to offer a convincing argument for the value of using complex adaptive social system theory in understanding school leadership.

The lack of recognition of schools as such a system causes misunderstanding of the lived nature of schools as decision-making cultures. Confused meaning and inaccurate use of terms are problematic in the literature and some introductory clarification of meaning and broad examination of some examples of confusion are offered here to illustrate the problem before a more detailed analysis of systems thinking and systems theory of schools as systems. Gronn, (2009), Spillane and Diamond, (2015) and Owens and Valesky (2015), all of whom take an organization theory approach to schools as systems, provide examples of the way in which concepts are used as synonyms where "the appeal of a distributed perspective [as an example] lies partially in the ease with which it becomes many things to many people", (Spillane & Diamond, p.1).

Foundational concepts of systems and systems thinking; complex and complicated open systems

The Open Systems Criteria Framework is a product of this criteriological part of the literature review. It provides a comparison of key differences between complicated and complex systems and is used both as a summary and as a tool for developing data collection methodology and data analysis. Hazy et al. provide a general explanation of the difference between complicated and complex.

> In customary usage, when people say 'complex' they usually mean 'complicated' in the sense of an intricate and detailed interweaving that one might see in a tangled fishing line. In contrast, the technical meaning of complexity does not refer to how complicated organisations are but to the type of interactions that occur between their elements (2007, p. 4).

This casual interchanging of terms such as complex and complicated is an example of the contradictions and confusion common in literature about school leadership and organisation. Examining contradictory understandings and a lack of precision and clarity across a range of key concepts is a major purpose of this project and central to the literature review. Superficial application of terms like complex can infer that 'complexity' as a concept is applied as an analytical tool when the word is simply being used a synonym for complicated. Shapiro and Gross (2013) use turbulence as a metaphor, for example, in their text *Ethical Educational Leadership in Turbulent*

Times. The writers acknowledge that "finding a solution to a complex ethical problem…is far from easy" (p. x). The book accurately applies the metaphor as an evocative description of a complication that can be 'solved' as a technical problem with a known solution. Turbulence is an apt metaphor for occasional disruption but does not capture the essential nature of a complex problem requiring continual adaption rather than, more accurately, a complex problem beyond a technical solution.

Complexity as a concept in school leadership literature

School leadership literature engagement with complexity theory appears to generally take one of two types; little or no acknowledgement of complexity theory or any other theory and use of concepts compatible with complexity theory but originating from organisation theory. Very few researchers acknowledge and include the concept of complexity in thinking and analysis. Morrison (2001, 2012) has specifically applied complexity theory to schools, but his work appears to be not often referenced in school leadership literature. Gough (2012) contributes a contemporary Australian perspective on complexity theory applied to schools, and his thinking is included. Duignan (2012, 2015) is another Australian who identifies the need to "recognise that schools are living, complex, dynamic, mostly non-linear organisations" as one of the macro challenges for educational leadership and he also notes that many attempts to change schools "tend to use traditional, hierarchical, bureaucratic and linear structures and processes" (p. 21). He observes the need for that "paradigm shift" (p. 23) and exploring examples of paradigm shift is a purpose of this research. The overall lack of attention to systems theory generally and the need for this paradigm shift are examined in the literature review. A tentative conclusion is that these omissions and the unexamined assumptions about schools as systems on which most school leadership literature is based leave gaps in understanding and generate mismatches with reality.

The second approach in the literature is to use concepts that may represent complexity but have been developed through organisational theory and therefore are not accompanied by the distinct and important features of complex systems theory. Complexity theory and complex systems leadership theory (Hazy et al., 2007) are

foundational to this research but organisational theory figures prominently in framing concepts in the school leadership literature which appear to be synonymous with complexity. This section is a brief overview of some important differences between organisational theory and complexity theory using ‘distributed leadership’ (Gronn, 2000, 2009; Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2001, 2015) as an example.

Owens and Valesky (2015) have provided three editions since 2007 of *Organisational Behaviour in Education: Leadership and School Reform*. They describe “a systems approach to organisation” (p. 97) and acknowledge “adaptive leadership” (p. 250) and “schools as open systems” (p. 327) in coverage of organisational theories. Two major perspectives on educational organisations are identified as the “bureaucratic theory” (p.3) and the “human resources development theory” (p. 5) and these are similar to the complicated and complex systems model developed for this research. Complex systems theory is not identified in the text, nor are any of the concept characteristics considered in any depth. Consequently, several significant aspects of schools and schooling are considered in particular ways.

Owen and Valesky (2015) propose that the non-bureaucratic theory “has developed in large part from the constant growth and accelerating tempo of change in today’s world” (p. 9). The complex system conceptualisation, however, is that the characteristics of complex adaptive systems have always been present although little understood (Bertalanffy, 1951; Boulding, 1956; Gough, 2012; Poli, 2013; Sterman, 1994). The view that an alternative construct to a “mechanistic” model (Mitchell & Sackney, 2016) is due to contemporary rates of change may be a cause of no consideration of complex system features. That in turn may influence the ways in which their bureaucratic model is described.

Mitchell and Sackney’s (2016) human resource development theory fundamentally characterizes the people in the school as human resources and compares that with the bureaucratic model that sees that as an “emphasis on the primacy of the organisation’s officially prescribed rules” (p. 5). The “non-bureaucratic” organisation uses “intense socialization” to get the participants to identify personally with the values and purposes of the organisation” (p. 6). Complexity leadership theory describes this socialisation as self-organising and emergence and the behaviour of the people in it as “agents that are information

processors with the capacity to modify their behaviour based on the information they receive" (McDaniel, 2007, p. 23).

The open systems aspect of schools identified by Owens and Valesky (2015) is described "as an input-process-output system" (p. 101) and they do not identify parents, families, nor students in the model. While the model describes "interaction with the external environment" (p. 116), they concentrate on the influence of 'big' ideas such as women's rights, social mobility, and legal-judicial philosophy. The immediacy and importance of the school's local community and how the school is defined in that context is not part of considerations about leadership.

Distributed leadership as a construct of theory

Distributed leadership has become a dominant vehicle for describing preferred leadership practice and some the writing about it is considered in broad terms in this section. The main purpose is to further consider how models of school leadership interpret and represent underpinning concepts. Distributed leadership is an appropriate example because it could represent the principles of complexity leadership theory, but this analysis argues that it usually does not. Gross and Spillane, are influential thinkers about the concept and some of their key papers are explored briefly. This review does not challenge the value of distributed leadership, but some limitations in the literature and opportunities conceptual development are identified.

Organisation theory without consideration of complex systems theory appears to underpin the way distributed leadership is conceptualized and investigated. Some of the consequences of this are identified in the Owens and Valesky analysis above. Gronn's (2000) paper, *Distributed Properties: A New Architecture for Leadership* eloquently argues against the view of leaders as "superior to follows" that represents an "exaggerated sense of agency attributed to leaders" (p. 319). His support for inferred value of the agency of every individual in the organisation is consistent with the view that there is no "chief agent" (McDaniel, 2007, p. 23) in complex adaptive systems.

Gronn's examination of distribution is explored in terms of "organisational workgroup norms (e.g. autonomous work group norms) and characteristics inherent

in the work itself (e.g. its routine or programmed nature)" (2004, p. 319). Division of labour (Gronn, 2004) is another activity theory lens for analysing the nature of distributed properties in schools. This terminology and conceptual tools do not capture the nature of schools described in the literature review in this thesis and are not evident in the principals' descriptions of their responses to ethical dilemmas described in their narratives or in the interview data explored in Chapter 5. However, Gronn's description of the architecture for leadership does contain potential for a collaboration of complexity theory and organisation culture concepts. That combination of theoretical approaches may bring the concept of distribution closer to the ideas of informal authority of every agent in a school, understood as organisation with fuzzy boundaries located in a community and directly affected by many factors beyond activities and relationship bound by constructs of 'work'. Gronn's (2000) description of learning as "also socially constructed" (p. 323) coupled with the complexity view of "diverse agents that learn" (McDaniel, 2007, p. 26) is a powerful example.

Gronn (2009) notes "the need for a new category" in addition to the "hero paradigm" of leadership evident in leadership studies from the mid 1980's and that distributed leadership has been a concept representing alternatives to "solo leadership" (p. 383). This new category is not conceptualized in a way that moves beyond a formal authority role where the activity is described in terms of 'work' structures and operations, among however many people with positional authority. Gronn acknowledges this focus when he notes that "recent discussions of school district-level distributed leadership patterns is a good illustration of how distributed can inadvertently mislabel a situation in which influence of a number of individuals continues to be significant" (p. 385).

The Distributed Leadership Study is the focus in a distributed perspective on school leadership practice conducted by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) The theoretical roots and the conceptual framework are discussed and represent the characteristics of the distributed perspective. They note that "to develop distributed theory of leadership practice, we appropriate concepts from distributed cognition and activity theory" and the importance of "social context" for intellectual activity (p. 23). They recognise sensemaking as important and describe how human activity is "distributed in the interactive web of actors, artefacts and situation" (p. 23). This web

in which the leadership takes place does not include agents outside "thinking about leadership as practice as it relates to the transformation of teaching and learning" (p. 24) in the school and does not identify agency in the wider school community. In their model, "leadership practice in the school as a unit" (p. 24) is the specific foci and the distribution of leadership is bounded by "leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers" (Spillane, 2005, p. 147) where they are inside the school as workplace with agents in formal roles.

Complexity science offers an alternative to this approach. Anderson et al., (2005) examine the benefits of "complexity theory as a blueprint for framing case study designs" (p. 671) in their exploration of research in health care organisations "and why current approaches are not making true changes" (p. 669). They note that "most traditional organisational theory leads us to view organisations as machine-like with replaceable parts, and if each part is doing its job, the organisation will run smoothly" (p. 671). Models from complexity theory view "health care organisations as social systems created to organize the activities and resources needed to provide care" (p. 672). Schools may be described in a similar way in that they are also part of a never ending process of change that creates new order through the processes identified by complexity theory. They, like schools, are also continually and inevitably immersed in ethical dilemmas (Rittel & Webber, 1973)

The focus in this thesis on ethical dilemmas necessitates a construct of school as part of a wider community context beyond the "school as a unit" (Spillane, 2008, p. 147). The guiding complex systems leadership theory of this thesis characterizes leadership as a practice of influencing behaviour through both formal and informal authority, not confined to employed agents classified as leaders and followers. The principal interview data and the narratives presented in this thesis identify the core purpose of student learning and the importance of improved teaching practice in the broader context of the influential factors that make up the unpredictable, surprising and uncontrollable context of the community in which the school exists. The findings and discussion emphasise that the participants understand school within their communities whereby the boundaries of relationships and authority are "fuzzy" (Keshavarz, Nutbeam & Rowling, 2010, p. 1468).

The theoretical frameworks informing the nature of distributed leadership suggest why it is used in the ways that it is in research, professional learning and

policy development. The intention may be to use distribution as a way of describing the value of informal authority and the capacity of all agents, including students and their families, to learn and to share accountability for outcomes. It appears however, that it is used in ways that represent the work, role, and organisation paradigms described by Gronn and Spillane, thereby exemplifying some of the dangers they identify of seeing such systems as mechanical.

The apparent interpretation of distributed leadership by Harris (2013) in her use of the concept is a significant example given the prominence this author's work has received. It appears to be an example of distribution of leadership intended as a tool to facilitate complexity. However, it appears to be applied with a complicated system mindset and therefore misses fundamental and defining characteristics of complexity. In this Harris example, distributed leadership is a method applied by a principal making use of formal authority structures. A complex adaptive social system interpretation of distribution would also use distributed leadership as a recognition of emergence and self-organisation (Morrison, 2002) as features of complexity, whereby agents continually create new understanding and act through the informal authority they give to each other. Crawford, (2012) notes that the dominant use of distributed leadership demonstrates that "the idea of the complex, adaptive, living organism of a school has been forgotten in the search for simple solutions to difficult problems" (p. 616).

Systems and systems thinking

'Systems' and 'systems thinking' are foundational concepts in this study. There is a range of legitimate meanings of systems (Sterman, 1994). Two different meanings are present in this study. 'The system' and 'system leadership' (Fullan, 2004; Hopkins, 2006; Hopkins & Higham, 2007) as used in the literature commonly refer to the overarching rules based organisation within which individual schools and people operate. This meaning of system leadership is one in which a leader with positional authority sees their professional role as extending beyond their specific position, of principal for example, to broader organisational leadership beyond their school (Hopkins & Higham, 2007). In this view of system leadership is characterized as "head teachers or senior teachers who work directly for the success

and well-being of students in other schools as well as their own" (Davies & Brundrett, 2010, p. 133). This meaning of system refers to the formal rules based overarching organisation representing the regulatory authority in which a school operates. System leadership, policy and change mean that which affects the whole or several parts of the overall organisation. It is the mindset in which leaders see their responsibility beyond their own specific role and are "willing to shoulder system-wide roles" (Hopkins & Higham, 2007, p. 147). This legitimate interpretation examines how principals can best see themselves as leader agents actively engaged across the organisation rather than confining themselves to a particular school. That interpretation of system is not the subject of this study. The system thinking explored in this study is the way in which one understands how the parts of an organisation fit together, how they influence each other and the ways in which the individual sees their own interactions as part of that system (Senge et al., 2012).

System thinking is the mental model of how a system functions, that a person applies to their problem solving as an agent within that system. In this context, a system "is any perceived structure whose elements 'hang together' because they continually affect each other over time" (Senge et al., 2012, p. 124). The concept of systems used here comes from physical and natural sciences and social sciences have adapted it. "The core components [of systems theory] have not significantly varied" over 100 years and the accepted simple definition of a system "included some set of defined elements and a number of relationships between and among the elements" (Hazy et al., 2007, p. 38). This study examines these elements in the school context. What is most important is how people identify these elements and the system of which they are part; the mental models, mental maps, or schemas they use to interpret and explain what they experience.

The systems thinking of interest in this study "is the ability to see the world as a complex system, to understand how everything is connected to everything else" (Sterman, 2002, p. 2) in which "you can't just do one thing" (Sterman, 1994, p. 291) because all the parts interact with each other. It is "a holistic approach which puts the study of wholes before that of the parts" (Shaked & Schechter, 2013, p. 792) where "the whole is primary, and the parts are secondary" (Pisapia, Reyes-Guerra & Coukos-Semmel, 2005, p. 42). Understanding how the parts act together and influence each other is the thinking approach of leaders responding to complexity

rather than breaking down the parts to understand them separately, which would be appropriate for a closed mechanical system.

The boundaries of open systems are difficult to control and define. Individual schools are examples of open systems. The school as an institution and recognised as such in a community has a range of formal and informal functions. Policy and regulations formally define these functions and they are interpreted at a local level through interactions between school employees, students, families, and stakeholders and interest groups. Schools both influence and are influenced by the human, social environments in which they exist (Gough, 2012; Morrison, 2001).

This study concentrates on the ethical beliefs influencing how these people interact with each other in the school and its wider community in a range of formal and informal contests, hence the use of the term 'social' systems. The emphasis on the social context is appropriate because of the focus on the organisation as diverse alignments of people and their collective behaviour. "An educational system is a social organisation, and all social organisations are open systems" (Jenlink, 1995, p. 24). Schools then are both open and social systems.

Systems theory

Systems theory applied to management and leadership of business and government organisations is a relatively new approach to understand and describe human behaviour in organisations. Bertalanffy, (1951) is credited with the creating the term, general systems theory, and Boulding, (1953, 1956), as co-founder of the term, contributed a "hierarchy of complexity" in which he offered a "possible arrangement of 'levels' of theoretical discourse" (1956, p. 202). Boulding (1956) proposed nine levels from "static structures" (p. 202) through to "transcendental systems, even if we may be accused at this point of having built Babel to the clouds" (p. 205). He made a point relevant to this study of ethical dilemmas when he observed, "it will be a sad day for man when nobody is allowed to ask questions that do not have any answers" (p. 205). Boulding placed social organisations at level eight, one below "transcendental systems," because the latter is where the "individual human system" (p. 204) must concern themselves "with the content and meaning of messages, the nature and dimensions of value systems" [of] history, art, music, poetry and the

"complex gamut of human emotions" (p. 205). People, he wrote, must engage in communication for shared understanding and therein is the nature of living a life "in all its complexity and richness" (p. 206).

Boulding also considered a challenge that has long been restated and examined in the literature since and remains unresolved. He noted that the level of "clockwork" understanding of how systems work remained at his time of writing as "probably the most completely developed level of (how systems work) in the present state of knowledge" (p. 206). Jay Forrester observed in 1998 that "understanding physical systems is far more advanced that the understanding of social, corporate, governmental and economic systems" (p. 2). Both observations on the dominant mental models that people use to understand the workings of human social systems remain relevant in this examination of contemporary education leadership literature, in which metaphors for predictable and controllable behaviour and known solutions remain dominant.

Rittel and Webber describe these clockwork worldviews of applying science to solve the problems of social policy in the 1960's, as "bound to fail" (1973, p. 155) in a paper that expanded their concept of wicked problems. Without using the term complexity in their paper, *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*, they compared 'tame' and 'wicked' problems and set the foundations for subsequent thinking about the differences between complicated and complex systems; a crucial construct in this research. Tame problems, such as those from the natural sciences "are definable and separable and may have solutions that are findable" while wicked problems are those usually found in social or government policy planning and "are ill-defined" and they "include nearly all public policy issues". "Social problems are never solved. At best they are only re-solved - over and over again" (p. 160). Wicked problems have been variously re-named as, for example, "adaptive challenges" in the 1990's (Heifetz, 1994) and The Australian Public Service Commissioner directly addresses this matter in the 2012 paper considered in detail in this section.

The mechanical mental model of social systems or "Newtonian ideas of order" (Pisapia, 2009, p. 1) is a common characterisation of how systems were once understood and a worldview that stubbornly persists. Rittel and Webber noted a significant consequence relevant to this study. "The professionalized cognitive and occupational styles that were refined in the first half of the [20th] century, based on

Newtonian mechanistic physics, are not readily adapted to contemporary conceptions of interacting open systems and to contemporary concerns with equity" (1973, p. 156). The reference to equity highlights their argument that wicked problems have emerged because many problems previously viewed as easy because they could be judged by efficiency are now being "challenged by a renewed preoccupation with the consequences of equity" (p. 156). Increased complexity caused by philosophical and ethical priorities is explored throughout this study, along with the argument that complexity is partially caused by a conscious need to respond to ethical priorities, such as equity. Rittel and Webber observe that "we have been learning to ask whether what we are doing is the *right* thing to do" (p. 159). This study contributes to that learning.

The journal *Organization Science* produced a special issue in 1999 that addressed the application of complexity theory to organisation science and suggested why a Newtonian paradigm persists. The editors wrote:

> Organisational scholars seldom come to grips with nonlinear phenomena. Instead, we tend to model phenomena as if they were linear to make them tractable, and we tend to model aggregate behaviour as if it is produced by individual entities which all exhibit average behaviour…. a different view of complexity is emerging that may have important implications for organisational scholarship. Within the past decade, interest in the science of complexity has increased dramatically (Anderson, Meyer, Eisenhardt, Carley & Pettigrew, 1999, p. 233).

This different view, although described in 1999, is yet to emerge in education literature, with little interest evident in contemporary education and school leadership scholarship. With some exceptions in education literature (Gough, Starratt, Duignan, and Morrison for example), most sources of research into complex social systems in this study come from the broader field of organisational scholarship.

Some public sector organisations are now attempting to "come to grips with nonlinear phenomena" (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012, p. 1). The Commissioner wrote that, "the Australian Public Service (APS) is increasingly being tasked with solving very complex problems" and that some are "so complex that they have been called 'wicked' problems'" (p. 9). She noted that "successfully solving or

at least managing these wicked problems requires a reassessment of some of the traditional ways of working and solving problems in the APS" (p. 10). The paper expressed the view that public services must be "understood as complex adaptive systems and not according to the mechanistic models that have traditionally dominated government thinking" (p, 10). As recently as 2012 then, the challenge of recognising and accepting fundamental characteristics of social organisations was being noted with concern by Australia's peak public service body after sixty plus years of diverse contributions confirming the complex nature of organisations concerned with social interaction.

One reason for a long-standing lack of awareness of, or interest in, systems theory in education leadership literature was raised in 1995 in a rare focus on systemic change in schools. Hansen, (cited in Jenlink, 1995) noted the ways in which systems theory was applied to education in the 1960's and 70's, including management by objectives and programmed instruction. He writes that, "unfortunately, in many instances, those were maladaptions of processes and techniques from the world of scientific management and systems engineering rather than the adaptions of a systems theory approach" (p. 23).

This maladaption appears to continue today with two consequences explored in this study. First, it may help to explain why education literature so rarely applies an understanding of schools as complex social systems. Secondly, the ongoing maladaption may be an example of confusion of definition between problems that are technically complicated and soluble through scientific management and complex or wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that require continual adaption.

Gough (2012) includes "some education researchers" among those who "have reduced the complexity of the objects of their inquiries" when he observes that "concepts associated with simple systems persist in contemporary discourse of education inquiry" and "researchers and other practitioners seek predictability and control" (p. 41). His paper is a rare Australian perspective on how complexity is ignored or misunderstood, through "methodology borrowing" (p. 46) and he offers a succinct summary of a theme relevant to the research questions of this thesis. "Complexity invites us to understand our physical and social worlds as open, recursive, organic, nonlinear and emergent, and to be cautious of complying with

models and trends in education that assume linear thinking, control and predictability" (Gough, p. 46).

Complex adaptive systems

The rise of complex adaptive systems as a school of thought "took hold in the mid-1980's with the formation of the Santa Fe Institute, a New Mexico think tank formed in part by former members of the nearby Los Alamos National Laboratory" (Dodder & Dare, 2000, p. 2). The term "appears to have first been used by Buckley (1967) to refer to a class of systems that have a capacity for adapting to a changing environment" (Hazy et al., 2007, p. 4). The term provided an organising framework for subsequent research and discussion about the non-linear, unpredictable, wicked problem features of social systems and is used with the addition of 'social' to arrive at the term complex adaptive social systems being applied to schools and used in this study.

Complexity theory, complexity leadership, complex adaptive leadership and adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1999, 2009), as variations on a paradigm of complexity for understanding social organisations and leadership in them, have been maturing over the last twenty years. They received particular attention from *The Leadership Quarterly* in 2006 and 2009, and papers from that journal are prominent in this study, particularly in the development of this study's Open Systems Criteria Framework (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009; Marion, Christiansen, Klar, Schreiber & Erdener, 2016; Schneider & Somers, 2006).

Schools and key characteristics of complex adaptive social systems

A complex adaptive system comprises a population of diverse rules-based agents, located in multi-level and interconnected systems in a networked space.

> Agents in complex adaptive systems are often numerous, dynamic, autonomous, highly interactive, learning and adaptive…. Agents in a complex adaptive system interact with and adapt to each other and the system within the network. Complex adaptive systems are open systems with fuzzy boundaries… Complex adaptive systems are nested systems made up of

> diverse agents that can often be also considered as systems in their own right (Keshavarz et al., 2010, p. 1468).

Schools appear to fit this description and the characteristics are examined in the criteriological inquiry. A description of schools can be developed using these and previously noted characteristics as follows. A school is a system made up of diverse agents including students, teachers, support staff, and the school's local community, all nested in a networked structure that includes larger organisations such as a regional administration and a central structure. Schools, as identifiable entities, also provide a macro system within which agents may be located in subject departments, classrooms, grades, sub-schools or services internal to the school. Given then that schools are complex adaptive social systems, the generic characteristics of a complex adaptive social system can be used as tools to assist in describing and understanding the relationships of the people who make up the school.

Change, in the form of adaption, is continuous and can be considered the only entirely predictable phenomenon in complex adaptive systems (Keshavarz et al., 2010). The key drivers for adaption and change are the interactions between the agents and the flow of information and feedback. These interactions cause changes to knowledge, action preferences, and behaviour and these generate further change (Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, Marion, Seers, Orton & Schreiber, 2006). This adaptive interaction is particularly important in the context of responding to ethical dilemmas in schools. Lichtenstein examines the interactions between agents that create meaning and cites Meyer who proposes that "people construct reality through their interactions within worldviews. [They do it] when they explain things to one another, tell each other stories, create models and theories…and in general when they interact through thought, word, and action" (Meyer, Gaba & Colwell, 2005, p. 460). Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) call this sensemaking.

Complex adaptive systems exhibit a property referred to as emergence. Lichtenstein describes emergence as the development of meaning in the spaces between people rather than the acts of individuals. Ideas and meaning are continually evolving in that space between people through the process described above. Rather than a competition between positions, perhaps promoted by individuals, emergence proposes that shared meaning evolves or emerges because of the way all the agents interact with each other (Lichtenstein & McKelvey, 2011).

This concept is particularly significant in an exploration of how principals respond to ethical dilemmas. It raises some key issues explored later. First, the associated concept of principal as an adaptive leader who interacts with other agents in the shared sensemaking and emergent space for creating meaning offers an alternative construct to the formal positional authority of an individual leader required or entitled to apply their own personal or professional ethical positions to resolving a dilemma. Secondly, emergence challenges how agents in schools understand their sense of self and the associated concepts of autonomy, integrity, and authenticity. According to Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009), emergence locates the self in the relational space of developing meaning between people where, perhaps, self and others cannot be clearly separately.

Sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) offers a complementary way of understanding the decision making that appears consistent with the nature of emergence. While evidence based decision making as part of a rational planning and evaluation process remains important, the concept of sensemaking captures the practical lived experience of how people in schools make sense of the complexity and ambiguity of everyday events, particularly when "the flow of action has become unintelligible in some way" (p. 409). In these circumstances choices can be "driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010, p. 185) and people "look for reasons to…stay in the action" in policies, plans, traditions, institutional procedures, and acceptable justifications (Weick et al., 2005). In these circumstances "sensemaking is about the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice" (p. 409). Jäppinen argues a direct relationship between sensemaking and collaborative leadership in schools and characterizes educational leadership "as a complex non-linear system of human interactional sensemaking" ((2014, p. 81).

Self-organisation is the term used to explain the conditions that generate emergence and group sensemaking is a characteristic of self-organizing behaviour. It is the name given to the way "in which individual agents in a complex system organise themselves, with no external influence, in such a way as to produce interesting and useful emergent system behaviours" (Hazy et al., 2007, p. 272). Morrison (2001) explores the concept in detail and raises an issue of relevance to this research when he considers the boundaries between self and school as a system, and

offers the question, “is the parent of a school student part of the school?” (, p. 156). Olsen and Eoyang (2001)address this issue through the concept of a “container” whereby “the boundaries of a self-organising system can be set” (p. 11) as physical, organisational (a department for example) or conceptual (an identity, vision, or mission, for example). Attempting to define the container of schools highlights the complexity of school leadership in the political and social context of who decides what the container of the school is, for what purposes, and based on what beliefs.

Reflexivity rather than homeostasis (maintaining equilibrium) characterizes complex systems (Gough, 2012). Reflexivity is similar to reflection as in reflective practice and is an important element of adult learning in organisations but has a particular meaning in the context of complexity and emergence. Reflexivity involves critical and active reflection on the organisation’s culture and processes for the purposes of improvement. Hayles expresses it as “turning a system’s rules back on itself so as to cause it to engage in more complex behaviour” ((Hayles, 1994, p. 446). Reflexivity encourages challenges to assumed meaning and deciding what is most important in a particular situation. Change, in this context of reflexivity and complexity, is “the reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action to accommodate new experiences obtained through interactions” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 567). The data collection and analysis explore how the participating principals describe this reweaving of what they believe to be ethical practice in a school context.

Taking account of the theory explored in this section, complex adaptive social systems may be described as nested systems in which diverse agents create meaning through their formal rational planning and evaluation, sensemaking and self-organising actions. Their continually changing shared experiences and learning affect the organisation, their own behaviours and their shared understanding.

The distinctions between complicated and complex systems and some consequences for leadership

This study often cites the confusion between complicated and complex systems as a fundamental cause of ambiguity and mismatching of models. Understanding these distinctions has a pragmatic purpose. As Pisapia (2009) notes, “In the postmodern

condition, leaders must shift from an over-reliance on the command and control (hierarchical) skills of the twentieth century, to a great reliance on the coordinative and collaborative (horizontal) skills of the twenty-first century" (p. 14).

Theorists and researcher coalesce around foundational and significant differences between complicated and complex systems, while they vary in the naming of the theory and the associated leadership behaviour. Complexity theory (Schneider & Somers, 2006), complex systems leadership theory (Hazy et al., 2007; Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009), complexity leadership theory (Lichtenstein et al., 2006), complex adaptive systems (Dodder & Dare, 2000) and adaptive leadership and adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al, 2009; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001) are examples of variations that also share common ground. This summary combines Heifetz' (1994) distinction between technical work and adaptive work and Poli's (2013) and Kamensky's (2011) distinctions between complicated and complex systems.

Poli (2013) restates the theme that the "differences between 'complex' and 'complicated' problems and systems have become unclear" (p. 142) because of the many different definitions over the past five or six decades. The last decade appears to have been a period of theory clarification and emerging agreement according to the sources referenced in this review. Kamensky (2011) begins his plain language synthesis for an IBM Center article by stating the importance of the distinction for "today's leaders' (p. 66). He describes complicated problems as "predictable and linear in nature" where "the relationship between the parts can be reduced to clear, predictable interactions" (p. 67). Building an aircraft engine is his example. Complex problems by contrast, "possess sufficient intricacy that behaviour cannot be predicted via linear relationships; such problems are also marked by a high degree of self-organising behaviour" (p. 67). He offers health care reform and recovering from Hurricane Katrina as examples.

Heifetz (1994), developed a theory of adaption based on complexity theory and applied his research work and professional learning programs to the everyday work of practical leadership. For him problems are technical "in the sense that we already know how to respond to them" (p. 71). These problems can be challenging and require great skill to solve but "the necessary knowledge about them already has been digested and put in the form of a legitimized set of known procedures guiding

what to do and the role authorizations guiding who should do it" (p. 72). Adaptive work is required, however, when the problem is a new mixture of factors, issues, and circumstances. While parts of it may be familiar, the whole of it is unique. Adaptive work requires learning and responses to the internal and interpersonal conflicts that arise in the context of each new reality (p. 22).

Heifetz argues that the common leadership response in the face of tough new problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Sterman, 2002) requiring new learning, or adaption, is to name the problem as technical and therefore identifiable and suitable for application of a known solution. Two important potential implications of this habitual way of seeing problems raised by these writers are that it decreases the engagement of stakeholders other than the leaders and it removes the need to consider the ethics and purposes represented in the problem. The potential consequences of avoiding increased shared engagement and ethics identification are examined in both sections of the literature review and the understanding developed informs the data collection and analysis. Principals describe in interview the importance of shared engagement and the narratives in Chapter 5 explore that data.

Poli (2013) also considers the consequences of leaders naming a problem one way rather than another because of their characterization of the system in which they act. Complicated problems "originate from causes that can be distinguished; they can be addressed piece by piece" and the "system can be controlled and the problems they present admit permanent solutions" (p. 142). Complex problems and systems "result from networks of multiple interacting causes that cannot be individually extinguished; must be addressed as entire systems" and the "problems they present cannot be solved once and forever but require to be systematically managed and typically any intervention merges into new problems as a result of the intervention" (p. 142). These complex systems "cannot be controlled – the best one can do is to influence them" (p. 142). Poli points out that:

> The distinction between complicated and complex systems is of immense importance, yet it is often overlooked. Decision-makers commonly mistake complex systems for simply complicated ones and look for solutions without realizing that 'learning to dance' with a complex system is definitely different from 'solving' the problems arising from it. The situation becomes even worse as far as modern social systems are concerned (p. 142).

This preference for solutions as a result of seeing systems as complicated but manageable, rather than complex and uncertain, potentially leads to a mismatch between common work practices of leaders and the reality of the environment in which they work and Heifetz et al., (2009) examine in depth the negative consequences of choosing technical work over adaptive work. This dominant preference for "treating complex problems as if they were complicated ones" (Poli, 2013, p. 143) is particularly ironic for Poli because "complex systems are not rare. Complex systems are the usual normal case. All living systems, all psychological systems, all social systems are complex. It is the complicated systems that are highly distinctive, very special, and therefore rare" (p. 145).

This study makes some tentative observations about the causes and consequences of this confusion and lack of clarity. People may use complicated system thinking because it is the dominant paradigm of powerful actors in the systems as expressed by the way power and authority are organised by formal authorities, how accountability and professional standards are described, and how decision making and power are interpreted by the media.

Black and Gregersen, (2002) examine the argument that while some leaders may not question assumptions about the nature of the system, others may sense that the dominant paradigm does not match the map on the ground. They observe that people tend to blame the mismatch on their own lack of expertise, commitment and skill. Therefore, they do the same thing only harder, blame themselves, and their efficacy is affected. The interviews and the findings in this study explore the possibilities that some leaders may understand the paradigm mismatch between their lived experience and the theoretical context of the technical work, and the complicated system continuum of leadership. It may be that they act as experts with formal authority but also continue to perform adaptive work where they can. The findings discussions consider evidence of adaptive work that may be present when the interviewees describe an approach that:

1. Resists naming and solving the problem through formal authority processes and requires participation from all stakeholders in identifying the conflicting values and purposes, and the alternative perspectives around the problem.

2. Generates the appropriate level of disequilibrium (Heifetz) by practising adaptive behaviour that results in acceptance of complexity, adaptive thinking and emergence as normal.

3. Respects and accepts the informal authority of every person in the organisation and values the potential of his or her potential ideas and knowledge.

4. Accepts that making choices for action is necessary with limited information in changing circumstances that require shared sensemaking (Mills, Durepos & Weibe, 2010; Weick, et al., 2005).

The findings and discussion of Chapter 5 include evidence of high awareness of informal and formal authority, the influence and importance of conversations, and a practical understanding of schools as systems that are both complex and adaptive.

Schools as unique systems

This section continues the argument that schools are a particular type of system and those normative characteristics imply ethical leadership practice that is most consistent with those characteristics. It goes further and examines ways in which schools are unique complex adaptive social systems. These shared and particular characteristics suggest some preferred examples of ethical leadership practice recommended in school leadership literature and explored in this study; distributed leadership is one. This section explicitly links ethic practice to complexity characteristics and continues exploration of the argument that there is a strong relationship between ethical practice and mental models of schools as systems. Adaptive leadership is examined as a concept and a practice that recognizes the constancy of ethical dilemmas as a normal part of life of an organisation.

The argument for schools as complex adaptive social systems and what that means for ethical leadership

The value of looking in detail at the particular features of this system rests in the opportunity to identify the DNA, or the particular nature, of the theory. Given the

history of confusion between complicated and complex systems, it is important to support conceptual clarity about the differences. “In complex organisational settings, there are so many things to look at that people can selectively focus on elements from the past and present that are similar, rather than different” (Black & Gregersen, 2002, p. 47). It is the differences rather than the similarities that matter in understanding a system or a thing.

The characteristics of complex systems and their relevance to schools as systems has been developing throughout this criteriological inquiry. These characteristics describe much of the lived experience of people working in schools and a strong argument for schools as complex adaptive social systems is the absence of arguments against the characterization. While only few apply the concept directly to schools (Beabout, 2012; Boal & Schultz, 2007; Gough, 2012; Jäppinen, 2014; Keshavarz et al., 2010), no arguments against the characterization can be found in the literature included in this study. Many education researchers and writers identify individual aspects of complex adaptive social systems without direct consideration of their origins and some consequences are considered in detail elsewhere in this thesis. The need to assert the case in the absence of opposition may be because of a lack of conscious recognition of schools as this system, and the potential benefits to research and practice of consciously critiquing the dominant construct.

The proposal that schools are complex systems does not include the conclusion that complicated problems are not present in schools. Professional practice includes technical expertise and expert knowledge applied to problems in a school and teaching context. This includes reliable evidence based knowledge on how people learn. Consider the teaching of reading and mathematics for example. There is a large body of research on which professional practice can be based with confidence (Chick, 2007; Watson & English, 2013) and in that sense there is a technical expertise that can be applied to the teaching of literacy and mathematics. However, that technical expert knowledge is applied in the messy and unpredictable context of schools and classrooms. Such technical expertise begins to merge with complexity when the needs of the learner, the prioritization of resources and the interpretations of teachers are added to the mixture in deciding choices for action. This study does not take an either/or approach to schools as complicated or complex systems. Different elements of professional practice and decision-making may be one

or the other, or a changing mixture of both complicated and complex systems. A conclusion of this criteriological inquiry is that complicated problems exist in schools. They can be addressed with a combination of expert knowledge applied in making choices for action in response to surprising and uncontrollable circumstances, made more challenging by the ethical choices they represent.

The theory of complex adaptive social systems offered here appears to describe what this study calls the 'natural state' of schools and this natural state view is explored in the narratives. The theory offers a way of considering the nature of decision-making, leadership, and professional relationships in schools that acknowledges dilemma, unpredictability and the tensions between ideas as the real business as usual in schools. In just the same way that ethical dilemmas can be matters of right vs right and continually negotiated judgments in unique contexts, the very nature of the organisation is one of unpredictable interdependence of competing views and interests (O'Neill, 2013; Osberg, Biesta & Cilliers, 2008; Senge et al., 2012; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). This view locates the thinking and action on ethical dilemmas within a complex social system constantly engaged with dilemmas demanding adaptive responses. Heifetz (1999, 2004) identifies disequilibrium as a central responsibility of adaptive leadership in that it is important to maintain a sense of uncertainty and constant learning as a necessary condition for an organisation's sustainability and success.

This is a quite different position to the one that appears to assume that the leadership and management of the school is largely a process of achieving outcomes through the use of positional authority and with rules, codes of conduct and programs and procedures that are reasonably linear and predictable (Davis & Brundrett, 2010). In this culture of control, order, and protection from complexity, ethical dilemmas may be seen as disruptions that introduce complexity to an otherwise stable system, or as stable as one can expect where humans work and learn together. A possibility for consideration raised in this study is that this model imagines ethical caring leaders as those who act in ways that maintain equilibrium and stability, who provide a sense of security for others while they take responsibility for managing the uncertainty of competing needs and expectations. The use of turbulence as a metaphor by Shapiro and Gross (2013) may be an example of this view.

This study raises the possibility that an important role of ethical leadership in this formal authority model is to represent and carry the narrative of what it means to act ethically and keep ethical practice and ethical priorities in the conscious mind of the organisation as it goes about its normal work. The leader(s) deal with ethical dilemmas as part of their role. This sense of ethical leadership as the organisation's conscience can be seen as creating the (sometimes unwelcomed) complexity in what otherwise would be at most a complicated system "formed by a set of connected components and a set of rules" (Keshavarz et al., 2010, p. 1468). In this view it may be that leaders have responsibility to check for ethical health while the workers get on with doing their work within the policies, rules, and procedures. Ways in which these two models are described and interpreted in literature are examined in the literature review.

The ethical leader models ethical practice in their own behaviour (Bottery, 2004; Duignan, 2006). They take responsibility for fairness and equity, for example, by ensuring they are applied through decisions about budgets and consequences for behaviour. Others may be interested and engaged but without ownership of what 'they,' the leaders, decide. Raising ethical tensions or priorities for group consideration can be seen as imposing a disconcerting distraction outside the expectation people have to get on to be able to get on with their work. A significant issue for this research then is the degree to which ethical leadership practices may be seen to create and compound the complexity through explicit and shared consideration of competing priorities and the explicit need to act ethically in resolving dilemmas, rather than avoiding that complexity and solving a problem through formal authority and in pragmatic terms. The principal narratives and the interview data findings include examples of how participants deliberately engage others in decision making about ethical dilemmas.

This research concludes from the literature reviews and the interview data that ethical leadership is the normal and everyday leadership necessary in an already naturally complex social system. Ethical leadership is a necessary acknowledgement that complexity is inherent as a natural condition of the school system and the adjective 'ethical' offers ways of behaving with that consciousness. The fundamental 'ethic' of leadership then is to facilitate the continuing shared awareness of why the people in the system might act the way they do. These shared agreements for actions

formed within acceptance of complexity generate a conscious norm of adaptability and a sense of efficacy rather than a sense of surviving, hanging on, coping, and being resilient during turbulent times of rapid change.

The complex adaptive social system theory in this study distinguishes schools from other open systems in which cause and effect can be seen and measured with reasonable confidence. Gough (2012) notes that complexity "offers an alternative to modelling education on simplifications of industrial systems" (p. 43) and Rittel and Webber (1973) proposes that "social professions were misled somewhere along the line into assuming they could be applied scientists – that they could solve problems in the ways scientists can solve their sorts of problems" (p. 160). Organisations in which a range of people engage in multiple purposes interpreted differently by individuals and stakeholder groups, such as schools, are described as complex with a number of typical characteristics (Haggis, 2010; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Lichtenstein et al., 2006) as described above.

Complex adaptive social system theory is a development of the concept of wicked problems, examined within a general theory of planning (Rittel & Webber, 1973) in which problems arising in human organisations have no single solution, and action on any one issue affects other parts of the organisation. Individual points of view define and describe wicked problems differently and solutions based on one definition of the problem cannot satisfy everyone with an interest in the problem. Schools are a natural home of wicked problems.

A school system theory within complex adaptive social theory

This section utilises the literature reviews and the clearly evident characteristics of schools to suggest that schools are a particular example of complex adaptive social systems because of the relationships with children and their families. These relationships are particularly important in the context of ethical choices and their significance figures prominently in the thinking of the participating principals.

Ethical dilemmas will remain despite the emphasis on the technical leadership of improving outcomes and the accountability for improvement concentration of plans, accountability frameworks, and the associated line management and professional learning support. They will remain because of the inherent nature of schools and the

inevitable and constant conflicts at the core of their purposes (Boulding, 1956; Rittel & Webber, 1973).

This school context ensures that the normal work of schools remains emotional, reflexive, contested and negotiated. These are part of the natural state of schools and professional participation in them requires understanding of those characteristics. This study is forming a tentative position that leaders must understand and accept their own position for action within that natural state of schools in order to be effective, valued, healthy, and fulfilled over time. Possibilities of burn-out, cynicism, time serving, and professional disappointment may increase without the capacity to understand themselves within that understanding of schools as an example complexity. Further research exploring the link between mental models of schooling and professional wellbeing would be useful.

This proposed school system theory is based on a suite of characteristics particular to schools and the relationships between adults and children in schools called schooling that is different from the broader term, education. Teaching and learning as the process of teacher efforts to improve student learning in explicit way is part of that but not all. These observations are based on the researcher's extensive professional experience in schools and the literature review detailed in this study.

The following features frame the school system theory.

1. A school is a social institution created by relationships required by laws. These relationships with children and their families are maintained and developed over extended time and evolve beyond formal requirements.

2. Schools are local public spaces in which larger political, personal, emotional, economic, and philosophical dilemmas are experienced and priority choices are made and represented through action.

3. Professional practice and judgment are constrained by legal duty of care responsibility for children's learning, wellbeing and safety that create diverse expectations on staff from a range of stakeholders.

4. Schools and schooling are interpretations of what a community or society sees as its most important purposes. These are interpreted in daily life and

formal purposes of the school, and in the ways the school develops and implement plans, and policies. This can be seen as localised sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

5. The purposes of schools are naturally and always contested. Public policy, requirements of a governing body and accountability requirements attempt to formally prioritize these competing views at any one time by and they are informally revisited and reinvented continuously in each school community.

6. Schools and schooling are systems inevitably interconnected with other social, political, and cultural systems represented by government and non-government agencies, interest groups, and networked individuals.

These characteristics combine to describe an organisation and a professional practice unlike any other. They describe a collection of factors that frame a unique context in which the adults formally engaged in schooling must act.

Within that group which includes office, support, and cleaning staff there are teachers and those with formal responsibility for leadership. In that leadership group there are principals and it is that particular group, conducting their professional practice within the school system as described above, that is the focus of the research.

Complexity leadership in complex adaptive social systems.

Complexity leadership theory derives from complex adaptive systems theory (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Miller & Page, 2009; Schneider & Somers, 2006) and is equally appropriate to the research questions around the complexity and uncertainty of responding to ethical dilemmas in schools. The theory offers an alternative to the traditional and hierarchical view of leader as decision maker with positional power and delegated responsibility. While this traditional view is part of the reality of principalship in government and other systemic schools, it is only part of the role in practice, and other perspectives on the totality of what it means to be a principal are necessary to understand how they might respond to ethical dilemmas.

Lichtenstein and his co-writers "propose that leadership (as opposed to leaders) can be seen as the complex dynamic process that emerges in the interactive spaces between people and ideas" (2006, p. 2). They go on:

> Leadership is a dynamic that transcends the capabilities of individuals alone; it is the product of interaction, tension and exchange rules governing changes in perceptions and understanding. We label this a dynamic of adaptive leadership (p. 2) … A complex systems perspective introduces a new leadership 'logic' to leadership theory and research by understanding leadership in terms of an *emergent event* rather than a person (p. 3).

This construct of leadership may not replace the complicated management and administration of schools requiring actions on specific, identifiable variables. What it does do is provide a way of examining the leadership dynamics around the complex interactions involving unique problems of conflict between agents and ideas where positional authority is ineffective and right verses right dilemmas are not resolved by codes of conduct and specific rules (Anderson et al., 1999; Evers & Kneyber, 2015; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Hazy et al., 2007; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001; Olson & Eoyang, 2001).

The position taken in this research is that ethical leadership is the leadership necessary in an already naturally complex social system. Ethical leadership does not generate the complexity through explicit consideration of competing priorities and the need to act 'ethically' in resolving dilemmas (Bauman, 1995; Branson & Gross, 2014). Rather, it acknowledges the complexity inherent as a natural condition of the school system and offers ways of behaving within that consciousness (Bottery, 2004). The fundamental ethic of the leadership is to influence habitual shared awareness of the good reasons people have for choosing certain actions, (Black & Gregerson, 2002) and to build public shared rationales for action. These agreements evolve within a culture that accepts uncertainty and surprise as business as usual rather than confirmation that the best a leader can do is help people cope during periods of turbulence (Shapiro and Gross, 2013).

Examples in the literature of the interpretation of complex systems thinking and its application to ethical leadership.

This section explores how several prominent writers work with some key concepts representing system thinking and ethical frameworks, with a particular emphasis on the former. Texts by Duignan and Murphy are explored as examples of comprehensive development of theory relevant to this study. Texts by Fullan, Shapiro, Gross, Starratt, and Heifetz are examined through a thematic approach to key systems concepts including collective responsibility, distributed leadership, coherence, turbulence, and disequilibrium.

Daniel Murphy.

Professional School Leadership. Dealing with Dilemmas (2013) is a text by Daniel Murphy the former headmaster, for headmasters. It is another example of considering theory and research and applying them to school principalship for assisting practitioners. His extensive analysis of dilemmas as one or a combination of psychological, political, and ethical (p. 7) is particularly valuable to this study's focus on ethical dilemmas. The identification of a dilemma as ethical is left to the interviewee participants in this research but Murphy's characterization of all dilemmas "as inevitably involving values…so that ethical frames of reference are required to understand both the dilemmas and its potential solutions" (p. 7) is supportive of this study's approach of concentrating on the ethical nature of dilemmas. The use of the word 'solutions' by Murphy again raises the theme of the connection between complexity, wicked problems and the ongoing surprises and adaptive responses generated by dilemmas.

Murphy offers a "dilemma tool kit" called the COPE process; "a sequential rational decision making process" (p. 130) for issue analysis for possible solutions. The model provides this research with a perspective for interpreting principal responses in interview and the rational approach must be considered in the psychological and emotional contexts he describes in the text. However, the COPE process remains a largely complicated technical system approach that may provide an unrealistic expectation that collecting data and considering options uncovers a long-term solution. The interviews explore the degree to which principals are aware of and apply similar models. Murphy's work is well supported by principals in the

UK and this research's focus on complexity has the risk of introducing bias to data gathering and analysis. His well respected work is a reminder to keep the research question on how principals understand schools as complex, complicated, or both in mind, and to be alert to the range of perceptions.

Murphy does not explicitly consider open systems theory or schools as one or a mixture of complicated or complex. He does note that dilemmas are commonly identified in research as "a characteristic experience of school leadership" (p. 1) and notes that Cranston (2006) reinforced the perspective that "such dilemmas are at the heart of the school leaders' professional experience" (p. 2). He also observes that it is unusual for education research to examine the nature of schools as complex social systems, but the characteristics of complexity are not identified as sources of dilemmas in his analysis. For example, Murphy notes that Duignan cites "turbulence" caused by global and technological forces (p. 2), and he identifies research into contemporary tensions, and dilemmas resulting from contextual pressures, as described in Gurr and Drysdale (2012). However, complexity as a concept is not specifically identified. He does explore the issue that pressures from public policy and emerging research on teaching and learning serve to intensify dilemmas, and that suggests the importance of the nature of schools as public service providers with open boundaries and competing, conflicting demands from diverse stakeholders. Complexity theory interprets this adaptive environment as normal, but this normality of schools appears to be interpreted by Murphy as "desperational change" (p. 2).

Gurr and Drysdale (2012) describe the challenges efficaciously as "navigating the complex and demanding contemporary educational environment" of Australian schools (p. 403). In their conclusion to the research paper on tensions and dilemmas in leading Australian schools, they note that "in our research a standout feature was the ability of successful principals to respond to challenging and complex context with a positive mindset and to see tensions and dilemmas as challenges rather than problems" (p. 416). This range of mindsets from desperational change to positive challenge is useful in exploring the focus of this research on the relationship between how principals see their schools as systems and what affects this understanding has on their effectiveness and efficacy.

Murphy's three dimensions model for understanding how principals deal with dilemmas consists of three elements; politics as power and influence, psychology as cognition, emotion, and learning, and ethics as values and principles, (p. 41). Each of these dimensions are important elements of systems theory and explored in this project. These elements all "infuse the perspectives" (p. 74) of the text and he notes that educational dilemmas "have often been interpreted in purely ethical terms" (p. 74) and cites Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010) and Ehrich (Ehrich, Kimber, Millwater & Cranston, 2011) as examples. Both of these are included in this literature review. It may be reasonable to conclude that Murphy is suggesting that an ethical perspective standing alone is an inadequate model for a theory on school leadership and that the three elements he offers are necessary for the theory and the model to be of use to principals reflecting on their practice. This study takes a similar position in that responding to ethical dilemmas must be understood in the context of beliefs about the school as a system and the behaviours generated by those beliefs. This system thinking approach encompasses power, influence, and how people learn together, and the research questions enable exploration of the psychological consequences of misalignments between beliefs about how schools work, and decision-making actions.

Murphy's view that "ethics and politics are inextricably linked" (p. 74) frames a pragmatic approach to the theory of ethical leadership. His model is a consistent representation of the title of his work where dealing with dilemmas is a part of the professional practice of school leadership. This pragmatism drives his 'ethical perspectives' chapter with an emphasis on theory that assists leaders to make hard choices in diverse contexts. Further exploration of Murphy's ethical theory of leadership continues in Part B.

Patrick Duignan

Duignan has studied and practised leadership for over four decades and captures all of this wisdom in one concise, powerful place according to Michael Fullan in his foreword to *Educational Leadership* (2012). Duignan's subtitle for the text, *together creating ethical learning environments*, captures an enduring theme of his work, often cited in ethical school leadership literature. The comprehensive text is briefly examined here as a study of both how systems theory is present and applied and how ethical leadership is understood and described. His detailed approach to the praxis of

connecting theory to action deserves a depth of consideration not possible here and attention is limited to three priorities of this study:

- Application of systems thinking with particular reference to the explicit and implicit use of complex adaptive systems theory.
- Theories of ethical leadership evident in the work.
- Characteristics of ethical leadership practice that inform the interview data collection and analysis.

Each of these come together in Duignan's examination of schools as "complex and dynamic organisations" (p. 21) and the need for a "paradigm shift in education" (p. 23). The paradigm shift is necessary to accommodate this way of understanding schools and Duignan's theory of ethical leadership identified in this new paradigm includes taking account of an interpretation of complexity in schools. He does this without explicit reference to complex adaptive system theory, and some implications of that are considered. Complex adaptive social systems theory is evident in his work, but complexity theory is not explicitly recognised.

The new paradigm he describes includes leaders "especially aware that everything they do in curriculum, pedagogy and leadership must have a clear moral purpose and high ethical standards" (p. 26). Duignan notes that efforts to implement these priorities into policy have been rejected in Australia by "forces to regression to old ways" (p. 26). He makes specific mention of Tasmania, where the adoption of "an ethically and socially responsible curriculum focus" (p. 27) ultimately failed "because they challenged the traditional paradigm of what a curriculum should look like" (Bezzina, Starratt & Burford, 2009, p. 15).

Duignan raises an issue of importance to this study in this observation. This researcher was a co-writer the Essential Learning Framework (known as the 'ELs') referred to by Bezzina and most of the interviewed principals were teachers or school leaders during the period of its co-constructed development and then failed implementation. The degree to which they consider the ELs to be an aspect of ethical leadership or an example of a new ethical paradigm is an element of the data collection.

The second part of the new paradigm describes a decision making process and a learning community with many of the characteristics of a complex adaptive

system. Rather than using open systems theory as a direct source for the new paradigm's way of decision making, Duignan builds the argument through reference to Wenger (1998) and Senge (1992) with emphasis on the nature of learning communities and "building communities of learning and learners" with "a focus on learning centred leadership" (p. 29). This learning theory interpretation is consistent with an approach that builds on features of complex adaptive systems. These features, explored above, are necessary characteristics of what Duignan describes as central to his new paradigm, "a collective and sustainable ethic of responsibility for leadership where all key stakeholders have appropriate involvement in key decisions that affect them and thereby, develop a sense of ownership of interventions as members of their learning community" (p. 29).

An interpretation of Duignan's theory of leadership from a complex adaptive leadership point of view would be to acknowledge the presence and power of informal leadership and the nature of emergence in which all agents effect and are affected by the way they communicate and act together. Being a learning community is not a matter of choice and informal authority is there without the permission of the formal leadership. The ways in which the agents learn and make decisions is the common ground for learning and systems theory and a basis for deciding a preferred professional practice. Constructing a shared culture of what this practice looks like is an important foundation for the application of ethical priorities.

Broadly then, Duignan's theory of ethical leadership is responding to a new emerging paradigm of the nature of schools as a complex and dynamic learning communities and evidence of how to most effectively educate every student to "higher and higher standards" (p. 18). This new paradigm identifies leadership behaviours, decision-making processes and formal structures shown to be most responsive to community and government policy expectations.

He notes that educators know there is "a vast amount of literature" (p. 21) on learning organisations and learning communities, yet many continue to "behave as if they were educating in factories and leading hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations" (p. 21). This apparent contradiction between theoretical knowledge and leadership practice is an issue for investigation in this research project, through the exploration of links between leadership responses to ethical dilemmas and understanding of how the school works as a system. Duignan appears to assume that a conceptual

knowledge of a learning community should lead to leadership behaviours that respond to schools as complex and dynamic organisations. This study supports that logic and pays attention to the relationships between practice and systems thinking. Duignan does allude to this connection when he notes that "there is strong evidence to support the view that schools as organisations are essentially networks of non-linear fields of relationships" (p. 21) and this requires a reinvention of how schools are understood rather than refinement of the linear, bureaucratic model of the old paradigm. The interview data support the need for reinvention and finds that the principals understand and operate in "networks of non-linear fields of relationships."

Duignan's collective responsibility and distributed leadership

Duignan (2014) identifies collective responsibility and distributed leadership as essential characteristics in his theory of ethical learning environments and argues a detailed case for both. He notes that "a collective ethic of responsibility for leadership will more strongly influence student learning" and the "deep moral purpose of schooling itself - maximising opportunities and outcomes for all learners" (p. 136). He strongly advocates for "the building of organisational cultures that are driven by moral purpose that encourage and support a collective ethic of responsibility for school leadership" (p. 136).

The criteriological inquiry in this study argues that schools do have inherent characteristics that demonstrate that leadership is collective whether or not the people in it want it to be so. While system models are included in a broad sense in Duignan's analysis, a specific systems approach to understanding schools as complex systems is not utilised in support of his argument and suggestions for action. Complex system theory explains that, while formal authority is important, the informal actions of every person contribute to making the culture what it is. No one, particularly teachers with their enormous influence, can position themselves outside the continual feedback loops of both sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) and design that contribute to creating the culture. Phrases such as 'I just want to do my job and go home' understate the importance and influence of corridor conversations and everyday communications between teachers. It may be that the recognition of emergence and self-organisation as key features of the school's ethical culture

independent of formal structures could assist individuals and groups to reframe their mental models of how power and influence work. Making use of these concepts would provide practical support to school principals as they "broaden their perspectives of what it means to lead a school' (Duignan, 2014, p. 136).

Distributed leadership is explored earlier in this chapter and is a characteristic widely identified as necessary for ethical leadership. The argument explored in this study is that while distributed leadership is a natural feature of complex adaptive systems it is largely interpreted in the school leadership literature as a mechanism created by the principal to manage the "increased complexity and multidimensionality of the principal's role" (Duignan, 2014, p. 126) rather than a generic and naturally occurring characteristic of schools. The traditional view of leadership needs to be replaced by a more inclusive and collaborative interpretation of school leadership. Duignan cites a range of studies demonstrating the value of 'distributing' leadership, and a central theme in this research is the degree to which this distribution is action decided by a complicated system mental model of top down formal authority driving technical knowledge and expert decision-making. Duignan notes for example that "a key challenge according to Spillane, is to determine how best to distribute leadership" (p. 129). While this formal aspect of organising authority and decision-making is necessary in a school, the research in this thesis suggests that the new paradigm Duignan argues for so powerfully will grow only if it is acknowledged in the leadership language. That would mean in this case, describing the ways in which informal leadership already works so powerfully in the daily lives of schools, with or without the formal processes of distribution of formal authority.

Coherence: Fullan and Quinn

Fullan and Quinn (2015) have named their recent book *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems.* Systems are clearly defined in the introduction to the book as "the organisation that the individual parts represent" and "systemness is coordinating policies" (p. ix). System thinking as working to understand the human dynamics within and across the parts is not identified as part of the book's purpose. "Coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work" (p. 1) but the nature of the work as making choices in complexity is not explored, although the importance of coherence is

framed in terms of complexity when leaders are urged to "be a coherence maker in chaotic times" (p. 138).

Fullan and Quinn state that "*Coherence* [the book] is our attempt to spell out the solution that anyone can master with focus and persistence" (p. 8). That may be true for the book given that it identifies in rich detail leadership behaviour and a learning culture that includes deep and continuous learning, a culture of growth, responsibility for internal accountabilities, the development of leaders at all levels, and the particular importance of collaborative work. The behaviours recommended may not achieve their potential because of the paradigm they appear to represent. As Fullan and Quinn note, "mindsets matter" (p. 75) and it is the mindset within which the book's narrative lives that limits possibilities and denies the true nature of schools as described in this study.

Coherence, as argued in the text, is achieved through the application of a suite of technical solutions described as "drivers" and "levers of change." This mindset is largely one of a complicated system rather than a complex one. A discussion of the same drivers within a complexity mindset would take account of the following:

- Coherence of shared agreement and action is not a steady state. Agreement about *how* to problem solve together may be coherent and consistent over time.
- While the strategy may be clear (collaboration for example), the learning and applying will be messy, surprising and inconsistent across the school. Collaboration in groups is self-organising and emergent and it is that understanding that provides the coherence as ideas and actions are re-though and re-acted.
- Implementation of the drivers may have some consistent technical elements, but implementation action also represents an interplay of beliefs, about authority and professional practice for example, and they are constantly competing priorities played out through the allocation of time, space, materials, and expertise resourcing (Johnson, 2009, p. 4).
- Things will not go as expected. Collaboration means actions become unpredictable because learning generates the unexpected. When a technical solution mindset identifies the unpredictable outcome as a failure of skill and expertise rather than valuable evidence of adaption,

> then collaboration is at risk of being little more than compliance (Jäppinen, 2014, p. 82).

Fullan and Quinn (2015) promote a learning culture as fundamental to success but fail to acknowledge that learning for individuals in groups brings dissonance, discomfort and conflict and learning for individuals and groups is not linear. Other writers, Olsen, Hazy, Heifetz, and Gough for example, demonstrate that these realities can be accommodated as strengths in the context of a complexity mindset. Fullan and Quinn touch on what for them are dilemmas that arise in the learning culture they describe, but these are largely unexamined in their text. They do come close to acknowledging adaptive action. “You never arrive once and for all, nor should you want to” (p. 2) and “coherence making in other words is a continuous process of making and remaking meaning in your own mind and in your culture” (p. 3). This process of making and remaking meaning remains in their text a process of leaders pulling levers rather than promoting adaptive learning for all.

They note that collaboration is “a powerful but complex” concept, that is “problematic” (p. 74) and that groups can develop group think or take polarised positions. That may be so within the worldview of a complicated system but there is an alternative. Jäppinen (2014) argues that collaborative leadership is a necessary expression of leadership in a complex system and sees educational leadership itself as a complex system (p. 70). Heifetz, in his theory of “adaptive work” (Heifetz 1994, p. 24) describes an adaptive mindset that requires the application of concepts including self-organisation and emergence. His work can assist collaborating agents to see these realities of complexity as natural and manageable parts of collaboration and sense making, rather than failures to properly use Fullan and Quinn’s drivers and levers properly.

Turbulence and Disequilibrium: Gross and Shapiro versus Heifetz

Turbulence is used as the through line metaphor in several Gross texts, including in *Ethical educational leadership in turbulent times: (Re) solving moral dilemmas* (2013). It is also the organisational metaphor used in the five qualities of “Democratic Ethical Educational Leadership” (Gross & Shapiro, 2016, p. 5). These five qualities have been available since 2004 and are now supported as the “New DEEL” by “educational administration faculties for over 30 universities and

practitioner colleagues" (p. 6) across the globe. The system thinking aspect of the conceptualization of democratic ethical educational leadership in quality number two is considered here, and the ethical theory aspects of the other four are included in Part B of this review.

This exploration of the turbulence metaphor offers another example of paradigm confusion, or at least the use of a mental image that inadequately represents the normal environment that is school. Heifetz' argument for the need for both the acceptance and creation of 'disequilibrium' as part of adaptive work is used in this research to provide an alternative reference point. The contention here is that the essential difference is that disequilibrium and adaptive work come from a worldview that is different from the worldview of turbulence. That chosen position changes the way people see and understand their world and actions in it.

Starratt, in 1995, offers an early interpretation of turbulence in his text on principals as leaders of school reform that is compatible with the adaptive leadership construct. He notes that "the new realities create a state of continuous turbulence" and observes that leaders had been "used to handling periodic crises with the understanding that things would get back to normal" (p. 4). He then uses the canoeing metaphor to predict the permanent shift in leadership from managing occasional rapids to "perpetual white water" (p. 4) where the "rules of the game are constantly changing and showing no signs of going away" (p. 5). Starratt set the scene back in 1995 with a prescient wisdom that seems lost to recent education writers. The turbulence metaphor has endured over that of perpetual white water.

Shapiro and Gross (2013) make some observations about the connections between turbulence and chaos theory and note that it is useful to explain that the two theories can be combined with potentially beneficial results. That may be so at the level of using questions to gather information and metaphors to describe events, but not a deeper system thinking level. The epistemology of turbulence remains unexamined in the book and the descriptions of it appear inconsistent with the characteristics of a complex adaptive social system, including schools and the wider systems of which they are a part.

Turbulence is explained and explored through architectural, mechanical and physical structure examples such as Galloping Gertie a bridge with a "lack of

rigidity" that made the "whole structure inherently unstable" (p. 48). The point is made that "stability in turbulence theory is a dynamic concept" that "is achieved and sustained through movement not by being rigid" (p. 48). However, there is an unexamined inference of a "given structure" (p. 50), that can be controlled with the right tools, and that flexibility is one valuable characteristic of an innovative organisation that can be managed to deal with the "destabilizing blows facing the innovative school" (p. 46). It is interesting to note that modern bridges deliberately replace rigidity with flexibility as design opportunities. London's Millennium Bridge and the Millau Viaduct in France are contemporary examples (SBS, 2018). The forces requiring flexibility are accepted as part of the natural environment rather than destabilizing blows testing these innovative bridges.

The turbulence metaphor and the overall narrative appear to represent a construct of leadership, decision making, and change more suited to a benevolent command and control model than one offered by the concepts of complexity and adaption. A proposal in this research is that this representation of leadership offers insufficient support to principals in the work of responding to ethical dilemmas. The turbulence theory assumes values and beliefs about authority, power, and leadership that remain unexplored, but the consequences of those values and beliefs have ethical consequences and profound implications for the daily lives of everyone in the organisation.

Heifetz makes the point about behaviour driven by ethical models. He notes a fundamental characteristic of ethical action: awareness. He says that first, the leader must understand themselves in order to "lead with authority" (1994, p. 67). That understanding includes seeing themselves as value driven agents, their actions as participants in the system of which they are a part, and awareness of practical action consistent with adaptive work.

The most recent use of turbulence and a test of its suitability to school leadership is in Gross and Shapiro's *Democratic Ethical Educational Leadership. Reclaiming School Reform* (2016). Contributors to exploring the concepts of democratic ethical educational leadership are invited to address each of the five qualities of the "new DEEL vision for educational leaders" (p. 7). The second quality is "leads from an expansive community-building perspective. A democratic actor who understands when and how to *shield* the school from turbulence and when and

how to *use* turbulence to facilitate change." This new DEEL quality is contrasted with "behaviour of conventional school leaders" who are "bound by the system and physical building. A small part of a monolithic, more corporate structure" (p. 44).

This description of leadership behaviour acknowledges several aspects of adaptive leadership and complexity, including the unclear boundaries for a school, engagement of diverse stakeholders, and acting democratically. This conventional behaviour is characteristic of a narrow view of open complicated systems and they are seen as inappropriate to true democratic ethical leadership. There also appears to be similarities with Heifetz' concept of disequilibrium in the sense that turbulence should be used by a leader as a tool for improvement.

While there are similarities with complexity thinking, it appears that confusion about the fundamental nature of schools as systems remain with Gross and Shapiro's argument, with the consequences under discussion here. The most significant of those consequences in this case is the limiting view of democratic leadership and stakeholder engagement represented in the concept of knowing when to *shield* the school from turbulence and when to use it to facilitate change. Conceptualizing this leadership choice as even possible is tied to defining turbulence as largely the result of "external pressures" such as accountability (Gross & Shapiro, 2016, p. 10) and "external compliance" (p. 8) demands. "The purpose of Turbulence Theory is to provide a way of working with the continuing fluctuations in organisations" (p. 44). The shielding from turbulence and using it as a tool in the decision making process of how to respond to policies, regulations, and accountability measures is based on a questionable assumption that such separation of forces is possible, even with a compliant and uninformed school community.

Two critically important aspects of the complexity of the school as an organisation are identified by Gross and Shapiro (2016) but not directly addressed through using turbulence as a metaphor for understanding and acting. They acknowledge turbulent forces as the "tumultuous conditions in security, economics, and the environment" (p. 1), but how a democratic leader might choose to shield or use them in a deliberate way is not examined. Also noted as critical is that "the ability to consider multiple ethical perspectives is central to effective leadership" as is the reality of leaders being confronted with complex problems that "do not admit to any simple response" (p. 10). These acknowledged ongoing normal realities of

schools deny the complicated system construct of the leader deciding to shield their school from them or make controlled use of them to manage change.

Adaptive leadership and disequilibrium as expressions of complex adaptive social system theory may be more effective than turbulence theory in nurturing the democratic process and social justice nature of the new DEEL. Heifetz (2009) argues that conflicts must be brought to the surface (p. 149) and his characterization of a process that trusts individuals and requires their skilled participation appears apt. For Heifetz, “conflict is an essential resource in getting to the real, as opposed to superficial harmony” (p. 151) and decision making requires acceptance of creative tension as the norm. Forward motion in organisations and communities is also a product of differences that generate creative tension and that, properly orchestrated, will resolve into a more integrated whole. The voices and perspectives that do not sound quite right together, and may never sound right together in isolation, are woven into a larger composition, and as part of the whole picture, they become essential. People learn by encountering different point of view, not by staring at themselves in the mirror or engaging just those with consonant views (p. 151).

A useful reminder for the interview and analysis phase of this research is provided in the way Heifetz and Gross and Shapiro provide different interpretations of the one example. They both use Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s response as President of the USA to the Great Depression in 1933. Both texts use it to illustrate their theories and thereby incidentally delineate some of the similarities and differences in their perspectives.

Gross and Shapiro (2015) see it as “a careful use of democratic behaviour combined with a sophisticated understanding of how to work with turbulence” (p. 46). They include in this interpretation of turbulence the “extreme turbulence” of a run on the banks, dislocated workers without safety nets and people in despair. They note that FDR never relinquished authority and encouraged “a great deal of debate and invention” (p. 46). They see this as a deliberate process of stabilizing extreme turbulence in order to lower and restore it to a moderate level.

Heifetz (2009) sees the same leadership as an example of “improvisational art” where there is no recipe and where any solution “is just a temporary resting place” (p. 277). What was central to FRD’s crisis management was an experimental

mindset of running several initiatives at the same time to “discover which approaches work best” and “making midcourse directions as you generate new knowledge.” These multiple overlapping experiments reduced panic and some of the “array of programs to provide economic relief…worked” (p. 278).

Both interpretations identify the importance of debate and invention although Heifetz emphasises improvisation and experimentation while Gross and Shapiro describe careful action and sophisticated understanding. Perhaps a key difference illustrated here between the two perspectives are perceptions about the level of control that was intended and even possible in the circumstances. How control, authority and power are understood and applied differently through the lens of complicated system thinking and complex system thinking is a dominant theme in this research project. How principals understand them is a main element of the findings and discussion in Chapter 5.

There are several reminders for the methodology and analysis in this research project. The first is to avoid imposing a theory on the data, complex adaptive system theory in this situation, and to look for similarities and differences between theories and the internal tensions within an argument. The second is to seek to understand the rationales and beliefs represented in the principals’ responses prompted by the research questions and to fairly represent the tensions and uncertainties within them. The third reminder is to explore the value of a metaphor or a theory to the participant and support them to explore that value.

Summary and the Open Systems Criteria Framework

The Open Systems Criteria Framework provides a summary of the criteriological inquiry into the nature of schools as systems and critical differences between open complicated systems and open complex systems. It is not a complete representation of the criteria but a summary of sufficient necessary characteristics. This Framework is used throughout the study as a summary of characteristics and as a tool for developing interview questions and analysis in the narrative inquiry of the interview data.

Table 1. ***Open Systems Criteria Framework***

Schools are open social systems in that information and human relationships cross between the boundaries of a school and its environment. To what extent is a school complex and/ or complicated?	
Complicated System characteristics and thinking The system can be controlled and the problems they present allow permanent solutions. (Sterman, 1994)	**Complex System characteristics and thinking** The system cannot be controlled and best one can do is influence it. (Sterman, 1994)
The structure of the system can be broken down into smaller and smaller parts and analysed and understood as separate parts. (Dodder & Dare, 2000)	The primary way to understand complex systems is through functional analysis – through the activities exerted by the system and the feedback across the system that changes it continuously.
There are clear boundaries and clear areas of authority internally.	The boundaries are fluid and flexible, disequilibrium is usual, and growth is unpredictable. (Heifetz, 1994)
Structural analysis is possible – the separate parts can be understood and put back together without loss of meaning.	Complex systems are such that they are never fully graspable by any model: models of them- even in principle are always incomplete and diverge over time. (Poli, 2013)
The patterns of change are structured by cycles, growth is controlled, and equilibrium is maintained as a priority. They are linear. (Schneider & Somers, 2006)	Emergence is a critical characteristic. Change occurs from within as a result of the interdependence of the people. Change includes unpredictable, need-based, bottom up feedback that is non-linear.
Complicated systems can be – at least in principle- fully understood and modelled. They can be entirely captured by suitable models. (Hazy et al., 2007)	Adaption is a critical feature. Adaption is continuous change and learning in response to emergent feedback. (Hazy et al., 2007)
The nature of problems: Originate from causes that can be individually distinguished and can be addressed piece by piece For each input to the system there is a proportionate and predictable output. (Poli, 2013) They can be understood through expert knowledge; information collection and analysis and a solution can be applied that solves the problem for some time. (Poli, 2013)	**The nature of problems:** They result from multiple interacting causes that cannot be individually distinguished. Must be addressed as entire systems, not in discrete parts. Small inputs may result in disproportionate effects. Problems can't be solved by repeating the same actions when it arises again Any interventions merge into a new environment that generates new problems. (Poli, 2013)
Technical knowledge drives solutions and ethical values may not be evident or important. (Morrison, 2001)	Choices for actions must be considered in ethical context of consequences. (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001)
The nature of authority and decision making. Leaders hold formal positions of authority that works through stated structures, codes and rules.	**The nature of authority and decision making.** Leadership as authority is also informal and is practised by any agent in emergent communication between them. It is often not reliant on formal authority structures.
Leadership is technical work requiring expertise limited to a few.	Leadership requires making choices and deciding requires learning, behaviour change, engagement and commitment from all stakeholders. (Thygeson, Morrissey & Ulstad, 2010)

Leaders are "shepherds, protecting their flock from harsh surroundings." (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).	Leaders show care "expose their followers to the painful reality of their condition and demand they fashion a response" (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).
Solutions are the responsibility of the leader, with the help of others through consultative controlled processes. (Jenkins, 2008)	Solutions cannot be the responsibility of formal leaders but through the collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2008) and shared responsibility of the people in the system at all levels.
Problem solving relies on organization charts and chains of command. The types of management tools typically used include project management software, standardised charts and tools and logical models. Documentation and specification are important, and success mainly depends on the execution of a plan or process.	Problem solving is intricate and cannot be predicted by linear relationships. There is a high degree of self-organising behaviour. Models that visualise interconnections and complexity are used to develop shared understanding of the problem. Ways forward are described with tools such as Balanced Score Card (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). Leaders focus on engagement, learning, managing the levels of fear and uncertainty and expand the power available to everyone.

Sources: (Anderson et al.,1999; Beabout, 2012; Dodder & Dare, R., 2000; Eyal et al., 2011; Gough, 2012; Hazy et al.,2007; Jappinen, 2104; Jenlink, 1995; Keshavarz et al., 2019; Lichtenstein, 2006, 2009, 2011; McDaniel & Driebe, 2005; Meyer et al., 2001; Osberg et al., 2008; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Shaked & Schechter, 2013; Sterman, 1994, 2002; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005)

Part B, the next part of the literature review pays particular attention to the ethical dimension of leadership through a focus on ethical school leadership research and texts. It builds on several themes established in this part. Most importantly, it explores the ways in which the leadership literature utilizes the finding of this part of the review that schools are essentially and inescapably ethical in their decision-making choices because of their nature as complex open adaptive systems.
Part A has identified key characteristics of schools, captured partly in their description as complex, open, and adaptive, and their relationship with leadership behaviours and recommended approaches to leadership in some school leadership texts. Part B continues the exploration of how these key characteristics are identified and interpreted in research and texts that focus particular on ethical leadership.

Part B. Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership literature is defined as the research and theory about leadership that explicitly includes consideration of ethical purposes and practices, for the purpose of this study. Starratt (2007) uses the term, "leading a community of

learners" (p. 165) and that approach to leadership is adopted here to include both the general term 'educational' and the more specific 'school' context. He identifies two approaches taken by the literature to the analyses of ethics in education. He notes the "traditional" approach of exploring issues of "equity, justice, power and care in the politics and procedures of running schools" and considers them to come from the realm of general ethics dealing with the daily lives of people "trying to live their relationships in a more or less honourable manner". He also outlines a trend from the early 1990's to focus on what he terms "applied or professional ethics in education" (p. 166).

These two perspectives provide the broad analytical structure for this review. This neat dichotomy is not present in the texts and this review is a mixture of both. It is organised into four thematic sections to provide support for the research questions. They are:

> Philosophical foundations of school leadership theory evident in the literature and opportunities not taken.
>
> Some contemporary ethical school leadership theories developed in recent mainstream texts and the thinking of some key thinkers, developed across a range of texts. The emphasis is on how the ethic is described in terms of outcomes and intentions.
>
> Definitions and key concepts of ethical leadership and professional practice with an emphasis on what attributes, dispositions, and behaviours considered to be characteristics of ethical leadership.
>
> Formal standards, codes, and policy identifying and describing ethical leadership relevant to public school leaders in Tasmania.

The overall purposes guiding all of these perspectives are to inform the data collection process of the semi-structured interviews and data analysis through an exploration of how the literature describes what it is to be an ethical school principal. This review provides the research into RQ2 with a theoretical context with which to engage participants and then to reflect on their contributions. The themes and ideas chosen for inclusion are based on an evolving judgment about what might be most relevant and useful in that engagement.

This exploration of writers, texts, and themes identifies approaches to ethical leadership ranging from the provision of a comprehensive theory, to examination of purposes and specific practices, through to a leadership theory grown out of how social systems work. Significant examples include the following.

- Branson's position is that "only ethical leadership is actual leadership" ((Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 440). For him and others, ethical action is a necessary condition of the definition of leadership.
- At the other end of the continuum there is the majority of leadership literature that includes some inclusion of ethics in the wider landscape of leadership practice. Davies (2010) provides an example of including ethics as an important part of effective and successful school leadership but not as a stand-alone essential feature.
- Shapiro and Stefkovich place moral imperative at the core of their "paradigm for professional ethics" (as cited in Davies & Brundrett, 2010, p. 26) and offer the paradigm as a comprehensive interpretation of educational leadership. Their work is an example of the professional practice perspective considered in various ways by several writers.
- The pursuit of social justice and redressing injustice is seen as the most important characteristic of leadership and ethical practice for Bogotch and Shields (2014) as editors of two volumes, including over 100 contributors from diverse fields of educational leadership and research.
- Heifetz (1994) exemplifies an approach to ethical leadership that describes a comprehensive leadership practice he calls adaptive leadership. This approach is based on complexity theory and enacts ethical principles and behaviours in its practice. This theory is an example of the nexus, already explored in the criteriological inquiry, between how a leader understands the systemic nature of schools and the ethical practices consistent with that mental model.

The philosophical foundations and contemporary theories of ethical school leadership.

Philosophical thought has a tradition stretching back 2,500 years. The ethics underpinning contemporary school leadership literature is derived from that tradition and this review proposes that this lineage is little acknowledged and inadequately applied as writers seek to understand and describe the nature of contemporary leadership. There are missed opportunities to make use of this legacy in current thinking.

The overall literature review includes examples of the ways in which texts skim across the surface of readily available philosophical thinking. Many appear to operate in echo chambers of ethical school leadership analysis that cross reference each other in a limited field with a resulting lack of diversity, depth, or critique. The review considers a number of mainstream texts in detail and explores some gaps and missed opportunities to strengthen and diversify the theory and to inform practice through deliberate consideration of an ethical theory tradition. These omissions and gaps have consequences that are considered through three themes that are explored in this ethical leadership review.

First, exploration of ethical concepts, and ethical purposes may be more valuable to principals if the rich depth of their meaning and the known tensions within and between them were included in the texts. Examples widely used in the texts include the nature of autonomy and integrity in professional practice and the ways in which justice and equity are understood.

Second, the tensions and dilemmas that frame the work of school leaders are not unique in time or circumstance, notwithstanding that schools have unique characteristics as systems that are explored in Part A, the criteriological inquiry. For example, the challenges that a leader may have with balancing the needs of an individual with what is best for the many are tensions at the core of utilitarianism. The arguments and tensions that emerge in specific school context choices are equally the arguments at the core of utilitarianism as a philosophy that are long standing and readily accessible.

Third, the conclusions of the criteriological inquiry are combined with the ethics literature reviewed in this chapter. The criteriological inquiry has

demonstrated that schools are not the technical, expert and rules driven systems they are assumed to be, and unconsciously treated as such in much of the leadership and ethical leadership literature considered in this chapter. Because they are complex adaptive and social systems, ethically choices are constant required as normal behaviour. Rittel and Webber's argument that ethical choices are a necessary part of decision making is considered in Part A and the ethical nature of those choices is explored here in Part B. Few problems are choices between right versus wrong and more often right versus right or even degrees of wrong vs wrong (Badaracoo 2013; Kidder, 2005).

An exploration of traditional ethical theories is not within the scope of this research on how principals respond to ethical dilemmas, but particular theories will be considered where they arise in the literature and in analysis of the data. Some writers and researchers make specific inclusions of ethical theory such as Alistair MacIntyre's thinking on practice (MacIntyre, 2007). Others are prepared to identify a guiding principle of moral purpose as a foundation for their work; Shapiro and Stefkovich's "best interests of the student" (2016, p. 65) for example. A suite of leadership attributes such as integrity and autonomy are commonly identified as necessary attributes of ethical leadership, and ethical practice commonly includes justice and care, and sometimes critique. These are also explored in the review.

While this literature review and the analysis of the interview data do not offer specific normative approaches to ethical choice work, they do attempt to address gaps in some contemporary literature. There are lost opportunities to support most appropriate practice through offering deeper understanding of the nature of ethical dilemmas, and the potential to enhance wisdom through knowledge of their nature through traditional approaches.

Contemporary ethical school leadership theories

Four concepts common in the literature are explored within the context of some major texts and contemporary research. They are best interests of students, social justice, care, critique and democratic ethical leadership. Dignity of the human person is not specifically identified in all the texts but is a unifying theme considered in this section.

The best interests of the student

"The best interests of the student" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 25) is the "moral imperative of the profession" at the centre of a multiple paradigm for professional ethics developed over four editions of a text used to teach ethics to educational leaders and as a source for developing ethics courses. The writers note that this foundational concept of students' best interests is not always considered in the study of ethics in educational leadership but that there is a need for "one basic principle driving the profession" (p. 25) as there is in law and medicine.

Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2016) fourth edition *of Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education; Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Complex Dilemmas* provides a "paradigm for professional ethics (p. 9)." It is a theoretical context for the application of the "best interests of the student" imperative that includes "three kinds of ethics" (p. 10); justice, critique, and care. Shapiro and Stefkovich note that these come from Starratt (1995) and they are common inclusions in current theories of the ethical principles of the profession of educators. These are treated as both desired outcomes and characteristics of ethical leadership. How justice, care and critique are understood and applied by the participating principals is a main focus of this research.

The paradigm also includes guidelines, requirements, and influences that are common elements of the systems in which school leaders operate. These are standards of the profession, professional codes of ethics, individual professional codes, personal codes of ethics and the ethics of the community. It is noted that they are part of the filtering process through which educational leaders develop their own professional and personal codes and they are part of the theory and practice landscape included in this study's data collection framework and analysis. These are additional elements of "the ethic of the profession" (p. 18) that the writers identify as a separate ethic that needs to be considered in its own right because justice, critique and care "do not provide an adequate picture of the factors that must be taken into consideration as leaders strive to make ethical decisions" (p. 19).

The text does not take up the opportunity to make use of ethical theory in exploring ways in which best interests of the students can be best interpreted to deliver its ethical intentions. The text acknowledges that the literature does not define

"best interests of the student" (p. 27). Shapiro and Stefkovich acknowledge that some of the ways in which best interests are interpreted in "the absence of clarification" (p. 27) have had more to do with the interests of others, and they assert that rights, responsibilities, and respect are often seen as key to addressing students' best interests.

Murphy (2013) summarizes the Shapiro and Stefkovich model and describes it as "elegant" (p. 87). He makes the point that the notion of best interests of the student may offer little direction in informing action because of its possible interpretations and that "many of the key dilemmas arise precisely because" (p. 88) of disagreements about what it means. For example, a school leader may conclude that the best interests of the students may be best served by keeping a powerful teacher happy and avoiding conflict among staff members (p. 79). Murphy also notes that "ethics has become politics" in this situation, and it is often the case in responding to such a situation that expedient avoidance of conflict takes precedence over ethics despite the defence that the best interests of the student was the intention of the action.

This is an example of the potential of philosophical theory to add value to ethical school leadership theory. Its application would make this rationale of 'teacher first' more difficult to argue. The ethics of Immanuel Kant (Williams, 2018) includes the use of two questions to ask oneself when making a choice for action. The first is, 'am I prepared to argue publicly that everyone should act the way I'm proposing to act?' The second question is, 'is the action I'm proposing respecting the dignity and rights of the individual or am I using them for my own ends?' Including these questions as tools of reflection to inform the best interests of the student would be of practical use to principals in the Shapiro and Stefkovich text, committed as it is to applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas. More significantly, explicit consideration of Kant's categorical imperatives may offer an opportunity to develop a deeper wisdom about the meaning of 'best interest' and the potential of supporting the leader to tackle important elements of the school's culture. The questions do not provide a solution, but they challenge the leader to consider the tension between treating the student's interests as ends in themselves or an expendable ethic in the face of other pressures. These dilemmas are demonstrated in the interview data and

Murphy's text as the norms of school life and, while an overarching ethic of the profession is a start, it offers little without the depth of the sort explored briefly here.

Deeper understanding of ethical theory may offer additional perspectives to understanding the ethical choices in this example and assist in identifying competing best interests. It may be that the decision to support the influential teacher and thus avoid short term tension is an interpretation of the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Kantian ethics may say that the intent clarified by the two questions is what matters and how many people are or are not happy as a result is not relevant. Staff more deeply engaged in deliberation about the best interests of the student have the potential to stimulate them to collaboratively identify some agreements on guiding principles and consequently move beyond short term solutions that respond to emotional self-interest.

While there is the potential for making use of such philosophical tools, the Chapter 5 Findings conclude that none of the participants explicitly applied or referred to Kant's categorical imperatives, utilitarianism, or any other established philosophical framework. There was a research focus on participant awareness of a philosophical theory guiding thinking and the importance of an explicit philosophical stance. They are included in the question schedule (Appendix A) and the Data Collection Framework (Figure 3) for the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured approach built on what the participants chose to say and there were no opportunities provided in the responses to explore specific examples of knowledge about philosophers or philosophical theory. The researcher decided to not ask direct questions about these because they were not volunteered by the participants and the research focus was how they chose to describe their ethical frameworks. There was a risk that participant representations of their own mental models would be tainted by such questions that may impose a view of what it means to be ethical when it did not originate from the participant.

The interview data do not suggest reasons for the lack of conscious knowledge or application of tradition philosophical principles. The literature review of ethical school leadership research and texts notes the same absence, with some exceptions in Starratt (2012, 2014) and Murphy (2013). There may be connections although participants did not mention ethical leadership literature either.

Social Justice

The theory that social justice is "foundational to the work of all educators" (p. vii) drives the Bogotch and Shields (2014) text, *International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Social (In)Justice*. This two volume work consists of contributions from over 100 writers and researchers and has the intention of "re-centering" educational leadership as "a field that is directly responsible for addressing social, political, and economic injustices around the world" (p. 3). They describe educational leaders as "educator-citizens" (p. 5) and synthesize the multiple dimensions of ethical motivation and practice into the active pursuit of social justice, including initiating social and political action. They note that the concept of social justice is explored throughout the Handbook and do not attempt a definitive summary. However, they do expand some aspects of the concept to include practice, priorities and desired results. In their summary of the contents they identify the essential elements of caring, shared learning, cooperation, integration of multiple views, and deliberate action that will challenge conventional wisdom. A priority of this ethical leadership is to "re-dress wrongs and overcome inequities" (p. 3), taking account of the local context. Generic qualities of social justice are seen as fairness and respect for human rights, and injustice is evident in prejudice, inequality, and oppression. The view that "justice is a right of the essence of a person to be respected" (p. xxxiv) appears to locate the concept of justice as a synonym for the dignity of the person, whereby everyone has an innate right to be treated ethically. The text does not make this connection.

Resistance to central authority and predetermined priorities and measures is an aspect of this theory of ethical leadership that is particularly relevant to this study of how principals respond to ethical dilemmas, given the formal delegated roles and responsibilities that are part of their work. Bogoth and Shields state that the 100 authors join to urge educational leaders and researchers to "disturb, if not disrupt conventional wisdom and dominant school practice" (p. 2) and call for the freedom of leaders to create policies and take action most relevant to local contexts of injustice. The relationships between public policy, local context and the ethical constructs of individual principals and those created by the agents acting in the school are important threads in this study. The narrative inquiry approach to the

interview data pays attention to observing evidence of theories in action (Silverman, 2014). A unifying and dominant driver such as overcoming injustice may be evident in the data. That rationale may provide a participant with a perceived legitimacy to act independently of the employer organisation's policies and accountabilities. The participating principals reflect on these issues and data are presented in Chapter 5.

Ehrich et al., (2015), who have a particular interest in researching ethical school leadership through research questions complementary to this research project, do not share this unequivocal view of social justice as the driver of action. They agree that ethics is "a dynamic and continuing activity rather than an adherence to a system of moral codes and principles enshrined in formal policy statements" (p, 196) and add the pragmatic context of being "contractually accountable to the system" with the need to address the expectations represented through standards and outcomes. They identify the need for principals to "consider multiple forms of accountability" (p. 197) within the context of close alignment to equity and inclusivity and this perspective also informs the narrative inquiry.

Bogotch and Shields' (2014) text considers public schools as primarily opportunities to promote justice and address injustice and that takes a much more extensive view of ethical dilemmas than the position taken for the sake of this research. Its focus is on responses to specific dilemmas and Bogotch and Shields' uncompromising focus on social justice is a reminder to the data analysis process of this study to tune into any such dominant philosophy evident in the data. Bogotch and Shield also acknowledge the importance of John Dewey's theory on bringing the purpose of education and democratic citizenship together as a way of "improving society" (p. 2) and their recognition of the importance of that heritage is also a reminder to this research to consider any influence of such thinkers on participating principals.

Care

Care as an ethical principle and professional responsibility is usually identified in the ethical school leadership literature and often identified in this review. Several elements of the treatment of care in the research are considered here. These combine to describe a tension potentially present in principals' responses to ethical dilemmas. Teaching has a tradition as a caring profession, with the connotations of a quasi-

parental relationship between staff and students. The tendency for emotional bonds between adults and children is heightened in a school context and staff often refer to the love they have for their students. These emotional and traditional meanings for care provide a background for the rational and philosophical approaches taken in the formal codes and theoretical ethical principles that ascribe meanings to care.

Care and justice are usually listed together but there are different interpretations of the reasons. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich they are "juxtaposed" (2010, p. 15), as in placed together for comparison, by some writers including Strike (1999). Starratt, on the other hand, argues that the emphasis on the ethic of justice "does not encompass the full complexity of ethical concerns" (in Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 55) and notes that the priorities are complementary. Duignan examines what he calls the tensions between "care and rules" (2008, p. 47). The agreed position is that both are necessary, and Murphy examines this pragmatic approach in responding to ethical dilemmas through his view that "ethical principles can often usefully held in balance, not forced to compete" (2013, p. 80). The interview data indicate that the principals support this view.

Reasons argued for the importance of both are broadly classified in two ways. A feminist perspective (Murphy, 2013; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 2012) outlines the thinking of Noddings from the 1980's that introduced caring as a necessary moral consideration that needed to balance a legalistic interpretation of justice. Noddings (2006) explores caring as "a feminine approach to ethics and moral education" and in describing what caring does, she identifies caring teachers as those who listen and are responsive to the child's "expressed needs" and caring leaders as those who work to "form the kinds of relationships conducive to making a difference" (p. 9).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010) that, if the ethics of care is to be used to resolve dilemmas, then the hierarchical top down rules model of leadership "from military and business models" must shift to an approach that emphasises relationships and connections (p. 17). This observation is particularly relevant to the argument developed in the criteriological inquiry in this thesis and suggests that care is a necessary feature of leadership practice because of the complex social and relational nature of schools.

Dignity of the human person

This is a foundational principle supporting the need for justice and care to be considered together. Duignan, Starratt and Murphy are among those who cite MacIntyre's theory of practice in describing the care for humans, particularly children, as an internal "good" of the practice of teaching. That care for all humans is due to them because of their right as humans to be treated with dignity (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 192)

This latter interpretation of care is particularly relevant to this study because it includes the view presented in this thesis that schools have unique characteristics as complex adaptive social systems. Care for children and care of children through extended multi-dimensional emotional relationships is the core of that uniqueness. While few writers deal specifically with that aspect of the professional relationship, the care of and for people that "places human persons in relationships of absolute level" (Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 55) is an agreed position. Murphy does examine the concept of care as one at the centre of relationships in schools and makes the point that, "in the real situation feelings of concern and relationships of care often balance abstract notions of justice with compassion and connectedness" (Murphy, 2013, p. 85). The ethic of care, he says, "is not a substitute for justice, but restores a balance; the climate of care is a classroom requirement" (p. 85).

Writers on ethics in the public sector more broadly describe a caring relationship in a way that offers a perspective that may become more common in schools. This description of care identifies the responsibilities and relationships between an officer (Lawton, Rayner & Lasthuizen, 2013) and people described as customers. This notion of care consists of "flexible and trusting attitudes towards clients; a preference for oral communication; and no sanctions on clients" (p. 23). The ways in which the participating principals navigate and interpret this landscape of tension, balance, and changing expectations is an important theme to explore in considering the data and there is no evidence to support this customer relationship interpretation. All six participating principals describe a contrary view.

Critique

The ethic of critique brings to the fore several of the challenges inherent in the role of principalship. The assertion that there is an ethic of critique as an identifiable virtue or attribute that comes with the job implies, or directly states, that principals must necessarily be active agents of political and social change if they are to be ethical. This view is supported by Bogotch and Shields (2014) and Shapiro (2010, 2013). That then raises the regular theme in this review of the ways in which principals respond to the fit between their private ethical selves and their public actions as an employee. While there is some agreement across the mainstream literature on the nature of critique as a theoretical ethic, some writers such as Murphy explore the nature of critique through the realities of school based action. Murphy (2013) notes a deep tension in characterization of critique in the context of schools in that it concentrates largely on preferring the individual to the community

The role of critique as part of a principal's role is a thread in the review of ethical leadership literature. The ethical aspect of critique is an expectation of some, Bogotch, Shields, and Shapiro for example, that principals should use their position to comment on injustice and take action against unethical conditions in the school's wider community. The interview data shows that there is an absence of this view of ethical leadership in the principals' reflections and this is explored in Chapter 5 through data about their relationships with line managers and the state government as employer and how they describe the drivers of their ethical practice.

Democratic ethical leadership

The Consortium for the Study of Leadership and Ethics in Education (CSLEE) was established by the University Council for Educational Administration in 1996 and has "devoted itself to the study of ethics in school leadership" (Gross & Shapiro, 2015, p. i). Their text is "a consolidation of theory and conceptual models" (p. i) and they state that the book's purpose "is to help reclaim school reform by advocating democratic ethical leadership in education" (p. 3). There is then a concept of democracy at the core of their theory of leadership described in terms of both leadership action and purpose. They state that the need to reclaim democracy is due in part to a dominant business metaphor driving education that has led to "the move

from citizen to customer" and a "descent into transactional relationships devoid of rights and community connections" (p. 3). School leaders and school cultures must not only model democracy but also promote it in the wider community and "inspire truly democratic ethical participatory cultures" (p. 3). This theory and vision of the CSLEE's school leadership is summarized in five statements describing new DEEL behaviour and beliefs (p. 7) and are outlined earlier in this review. Several elements of this theory and how it is interpreted are particularly relevant to this project.

The system theory element of the vision is based on Gross' (1998) "Turbulence Theory" (p. 44) and examines how leaders can decide whether or not to shield people from turbulence or use to it facilitate change. This managing turbulence metaphor aspect of ethical democratic leadership is examined in detail in the criteriological inquiry, Part A. The relationship between the leader and the wider organisation in which they work has some specific features considered to be democratic. For Gross (2015) democratic ethical leaders are "guided by an inner sense of responsibility to students, faculty, staff and the community and social development on a world scale" rather than "the behaviour of conventional school leaders" who are "driven by an exterior pressure of accountability to those above in the organisational/ political hierarchy" (p. 7). This interpretation identifies the inner self's sense of responsibility as a legitimate source of democratic sensibility, but accountability to the policies of government as not a legitimate source of ethical practice. This juxtaposition raises the ongoing tensions experienced by school principals as they interpret their "moral courage of doing the right thing" (p. 128) within the landscape of the private or inner self, and their concepts of what it means to be professional as described by their employer.

How principals make hard choices in this landscape is explored in the narratives in Chapter 3 and the interview data findings and discussion in Chapter 5. The findings describe a view of democratic leadership that is quite different to that presented by Gross (1998) and Gross and Shapiro (2015). This prioritizing of personal interpretations over obedience to authority and regulations continues in the new DEEL democratic theory and vision that requires ethical leaders to pursue a "dynamic, inclusive democratic vision" based on a "deep understanding of ethical decision-making." This is contrasted negatively with obeying an ethic of justice required by regulations "despite one's own misgivings" (2015, p. 7). Participating

principals were invited to reflect on this tension in interview where appropriate, although not as a dichotomy of ethical and unethical, but as a range of choices practising principals make in the complexity of real circumstances.

The DEEL vision identifies the "the concepts of democracy, social justice and school reform" (p. 7) as the core ethical principles and it requires leaders to integrate them though scholarship, dialogue and action. The dominant conventional behaviour, they argue, is to separate democracy and social justice from merely a guiding vision and, instead, have school improvement as the dominant objective. While democracy and social justice are commonly identified as driving concepts for ethical leadership, school reform is not usually seen as a preferred priority in other ethical school leadership literature. Gross and Shapiro and other contributors to the book acknowledge that the new DEEL's "vision statement challenges the notion of accountability squarely" partly because that approach is not a "route to a more just society" (p. 7). Rather than follow policy and regulation, the democratic ethical leader resists these restrictions and has a far more expansive vision of their purpose. These challenges to the concept of what it means to be professional may be due in part to the rise in transparency and accountability driven government policy are identified in the Introduction to this study and explored further in this section.

Professional ethics and professional practice as leadership themes

The interview process and data analysis consider the level of commitment participants have to acting independently to pursue social reform beyond the school and outside the bureaucratic structure of which they are a part, and the degree to which they see their work as 'a calling.' This calling is represented by the well-developed sense of mission encouraged in the DEEL vision of democratic social improvement that "cuts across political, national, class, gender, racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries" (Gross & Shapiro, 2016, p. 7). The interview data does not indicate such a level of tension between principals' work in schools and their membership of a larger organisation and they did not see a disconnection between issues of justice and school reform.

There appears to be a strong preference in Gross and Schapiro's theory of leadership for "the inner self" (p. 7) to be the source of what it means to be

democratic and socially just. This concept is aligned with concepts of integrity and autonomy that are commonly identified in the literature, but diversely interpreted. They are explored specifically in this review in the section on ethical leadership attributes. The "inner self" has a very particular application as a concept in the New DEEL in which the individual self becomes the ethical counterpoint to the unethical regulations and accountabilities imposed by corporate structures. This conceptualization generates apparent omissions and contradictions. Their core summary of the new DEEL vision does not include working with others in its view of professional practice and theory, for example. The creation of shared meaning through a disposition for engaging others in the process of leading and acting is not clearly evident and concepts of collaboration, shared sensemaking and emergence are not considered. It appears ironic on face value that a passionate call to a democratic vision is driven by the certainties of the inner self.

"Dialogue" (p. 12) is identified as a means to school reform and the community building that is identified is driven by the leader's decisions of when to shield and when to share. This view of democratic participation is explored further in Part A where it is characterised more as a top down, authoritarian approach rather than an adaptive leadership approach based on acknowledging, valuing and engaging the informal leadership and self-organising capacity of people in organisations. All agents in that model share ownership of decision making and problem solving, and it could be argued that that construct of leadership better fits the democratic vision of the New DEEL than the one they subscribe to of the courageous, transformation individual driven by an inner sense, and confident in the knowledge of what is right for others.

Leading thinkers: Robert Starratt and Daniel Murphy

This review considers Starratt and Murphy in some detail because their thinking is particularly illuminating in exploring the research questions. Both pay particular attention to the application of ethical theories to the practice of teaching and school leadership. They locate their theories in schools and the narrative inquiry research shows a high level of compatibility between their views and the principals' understanding of their practice.

Robert Starratt

Starratt has written extensively for over 20 years on ethical schools and the purposes of education and he is regularly cited in the ethical school and leadership literature. This section provides some observations on his more recent thinking about the theory of leadership.

Starratt identifies an ethical philosophy foundation to his thinking that adds a particular flavour to his work on leadership and schooling that distinguishes it from others. Two themes are dominant in his perspective. He contributes the concept of the dignity of human persons to his analysis of social justice when the common approach is to describe it as rights provided through political process. He also considers integrity and authenticity as "the moral good of the practice of teaching" (2014, p. 79) and his analyses explicitly introduce the philosophical arguments of Kant and MacIntyre into the conversation.

Starratt's more recent theory of ethical leadership is part of an evolving theory explored through an interconnected suite of the virtues of responsibility, presence, and authenticity (2005). This review concentrates on his 2014 "attempt to provide a framework of ethical leadership that is closely tied to the ethical integrity of educating" (in Branson, 2014, p. 43). The framework consists of foundational dispositions for acting ethically rather than a core statement of mission or set of social and economic improvements. The purposes of his framework are to model ethical behaviour and the "cultivation" in students of the qualities they will need to be authentic participants in the relationships they will have with the natural, social, and cultural world (p. 44). Starratt is specific in framing his theory in the context of teaching, classrooms, and the nature of young learners. This deliberate focus on "ethical leadership of the institution where school learning takes place" (p. 44) is the context for his philosophical treatment of the foundational qualities and predispositions he identifies.

These combined features of his approach distinguish his work from others and are valuable in this research, particularly his consideration of the relationships between the "relational" nature of schools (p. 44), their location in a community, the nature of young learners, and teachers as mature persons "sharing our lives with others" (p. 44). He alludes to a key concept of complex adaptive social systems when

he notes, “we live by, with and through other human beings. We do not constitute ourselves independently of our relationship to others” (p. 44). As argued in the criteriological inquiry, organisations consist of people who come together and create the organisation and their interactions create the culture. Organisations do not learn or change, people acting with and through each other learn and change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Starratt (2014) locates his theory of ethical leadership within the broader context of “foundational qualities of the mature person” (p. 44) and “the predispositions or foundational qualities of an adult ethical life” (p. 60) and he acknowledges the influence of a diversity of philosophical thinking. This attention to philosophy is an unusual approach in ethical school leadership texts, as mentioned elsewhere in this study. Autonomy, connectedness, and self-transcendence are the three predispositions or foundational qualities of an adult ethical life that must be active in an ethical leader, according to Starratt. These are considered where Starratt’s interpretations are included in specific exploration of key concepts and themes occurring across the literature. The particular point to make here about his theory is the focus on the mature person and an adult ethical life that Starratt describes and he then locates school leadership within that. “The ethical person has developed relatively mature qualities of autonomy, connectedness and transcendence” (p. 46) and those qualities are prerequisites for acting as an ethical school leader. For Starratt, ethical leadership is fundamentally not a professional construct built through professional learning, nor defined by codes, regulations or the nature of schools. The ‘ethical’ part of the leadership comes from a more profound source he calls “the ontology of the human” (p. 44). This approach of identifying the preferred attributes of the adults in a school and the source of their ethics as deeper than professional learning are valuable insights for this study.

Three ethics guide the ethical practice of leadership in the institution where school learning takes place: the ethic of justice, the ethic of care, and the professional ethics of teaching. These are often occurring themes in the literature, but there are some aspects of Starratt’s treatment that are particularly relevant to the ethical leadership theory focus of this section.

The pragmatism of grounding theory and concepts of ethics in professional practice and the work of schools continues as a theme for Starratt when he considers

the ethic of justice as one that "provides guidance to many school policies and procedures") while it also "insists on some uniform attention to equity and fairness" (2014, p. 54). Rather than the expansive activist expectations placed on schools and leaders by Bogotch and Shields (2014), he notes that students must learn about injustice that occurs in the community and teachers must themselves model just behaviour. This is done through recognition of the rights and responsibilities of teachers and students and the application of three ways that justice is applied in civil society: "distributive, retributive and restorative" (p. 54). While there may be little philosophical discourse about justice in school curricula and policy, these applications of the concept are common in schools and Starratt's treatment contributes to the ways in which relevant interview data can be interpreted. The findings in Chapter 5 do not include a detailed analysis of justice but the general finding is that justice is seen by the principals as a core guiding principle that must be represented through their behaviour and what students experience in their school lives.

The philosophical heritage of ethical concepts continues to be a flavour of Starratt's ethic of leadership. He has argued since 1991 that the ethic of justice "does not encompass the full complexity of ethical concerns" (1991, p. 55) and must be complemented by the ethic of care. Care, for Starratt, "places human persons in relationships of absolute value. It enacts the belief that each person enjoys an intrinsic dignity and worth and, given the chance, will reveal genuinely admirable qualities" (p. 55). Stating the absolute worth of the human person and the belief that everyone (particularly children in this context) has admirable qualities is a foundational position on which all actions must be based. Others consider care differently and that has been explored above. The relevance here to ethical leadership theory is that Starratt states the Kantian philosophical absolute of the intrinsic worth and dignity of all persons as bedrock for school leadership. The interview data does not explicitly express this view although it can be fairly inferred from several quotations and the general importance placed on ethical behaviour towards all people.

Daniel Murphy

Murphy (2013) considers ethical principles and decision-making within the context of dealing with and resolving dilemmas in schools. His focus is on offering principals a practical "dilemma toolkit" (p. 130) for rational action as an expression of his leadership theory and his chapter on ethical perspectives contributes theoretical points of view that provide counterpoints to other positions explored in this review. His ethical perspectives chapter is particularly relevant to researching this project's research questions.

His succinct observations assist in clarifying some of the challenges in this research project, particularly the ways in which ethical practice and systems thinking may be related. He asserts that "moral enquiry aims to establish a basis for adopting particular values beyond individual preference. Ethical practice applies such values to specific situations but requires the complementary perspectives of psychology and politics" (p. 73). His text is an exploration of those perspectives and this research can be seen as a research focus within that model, while the importance of complexity thinking is an additional contribution.

Murphy constantly frames his arguments in the practice of leadership and dealing with dilemmas, as does this research, and his ethical perspectives are useful contributions to understanding the nature of responding to ethical dilemmas. He acknowledges the central point that dilemmas "raise significant ethical issues" and argues that ethical judgements are "best made in the situation, not in general" (p. 75). He also concludes that 'those best placed to make such judgments have cultivated virtues such as wisdom and integrity.' These 'virtues' appear in most of the lists of character traits of ethical leaders in the literature and are explored in this literature review.

He identifies dialectical thinking as the thinking approach most relevant to dealing with dilemmas because it "captures the tensions and uncertainties of these matters better than linear positivism" (p. 75) and it adds dimensions to decision making that the often recommended dialogue does not. Suggesting this form of thinking as a preferred approach because it "recognises interdependence and refutes apparent independence of individuals" (p. 96) recognises implicitly the nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems. This compatibility is examined further

in Part A of this literature review through the exploration of connectedness, collaboration and sensemaking (Jäppinen, 2014; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick, 1995).

Murphy examines links between philosophy, ethical theory, and recent research into school leadership and he critiques some of the leadership theory and models offered to school leaders. He offers "an alignment of affect and intellect in real life situations" and describes the difficulty as a headmaster in moving from ethical analysis to concrete moral action (p. 86) in the intense 'face-to-face' character of school reality. This empathetic disposition is important to remember in this research project as practitioners are invited to reflect on their own actions as interpretations of theory and belief. Murphy's observations are a reminder of the importance of first seeking to understand and then seeking out the good reasons people have for acting how they do.

The ethics of the virtues of care, of critique, and the ethics of justice frame the ethical perspective of his professional school leadership theory (p. 86). He applies Furman's (2004) thinking on "the ethics of community" as "the necessary missing link in applying these ethics to schools because they lack the ethic of community that sees the communal not the individual as the primary locus of moral agency" (p. 89). He supports a fundamental aspect of complex adaptive social system theory in noting that ethical dilemmas involve people in the community who must participate in the resolution of dilemmas (p. 89). There are obvious links here to theories that place democracy at the centre of ethical leadership, and the thinking of Gross and Shapiro (2016) is an example considered in this chapter. Murphy observes that "plural democracy is itself an ethical theory in which we value each other's differences, more than we value any set of absolute principles in which we believe" (p. 98). The interview data support this view.

Murphy identifies several philosophers as particularly relevant to school leadership and ethical dilemmas. He pays particular attention to MacIntyre and to theories of critique and care and these are threads in the literature review. He also pays particular attention to what he calls emotivist philosophy and this adds a counterpoint to some philosopher perspectives offered by others contributing to ethical leadership theory. Emotivism, says Murphy, is evident when people argue that "we are all entitled to our point of view" (p. 80) and that we all have a

fundamental right to our own opinion. If one 'feels' something is right, or one 'just knows' then that is sufficient justification. Murphy argues that this commonly held view of deciding what is right "renders discussion useless" where "respect for difference is valued more highly than any collective endeavour to seek out the truth (p. 80)." Emotivism and intuitivism are philosophical theories implicit and sometimes explicit in some ethical leadership theory considered in this review. There are no interview data suggesting that these theories influence principals' practice.

Murphy on Intuition

Intuition has qualities similar to emotivism and is mentioned often in the literature, usually without critique. Murphy's cautionary note about this acceptance of a personal feeling does not appear in any other text considered for this literature review. An example of embracing emotivism is included in a significant and comprehensive text edited by Branson and Gross, the *Handbook of Ethical Educational Leadership* (2014). Branson's approach to intuition is an example of the thinking of which Murphy is negatively critical, and Branson's arguments are included in the section exploring the Handbook he edited. In summary, an apparent example in that text of 'I just know it is right' is Branson's concept of the "universal self"', described as a "metaphysical empathy" for the "subtle essence of each of us" (p. 270). This understanding leads us to connecting with a second level of consciousness where we "are most likely unaware of our moral decision making…which happens automatically and often beyond our awareness" (p. 270). Branson's extensive thinking on the nature of ethical leadership is further explored throughout the rest of this chapter.

What is ethical school leadership?

Some of the key concepts considered in this section and identified in education leadership literature as important elements that define ethical schools and leadership are integrity, authenticity, autonomy, intuition, and professional. These are closely associated with some purposes and intended outcomes of ethical leadership: democracy, social justice and care. These concepts and purposes are tightly woven together in the rich tapestry of research and thinking due to cross referencing between writers and a largely shared framework for thinking. This literature review attempts to identify these shared threads and some differences in design and

approach. Two particular threads of understanding are included in this section under separate headings. Some texts and research papers deal directly with defining ethical leadership and there are detailed examinations of the 'professional ethic' of school leadership and the nature of what it means to be professional in a school context.

"If it isn't ethical, it isn't leadership" (p. 439) writes Christopher Branson in the *Handbook of Ethical Education Leadership,* (Branson & Gross, 2014). Paul Begley and Patrick Duignan, influential contributors to research into ethical education leadership, describe the Handbook in its preface as containing the best thinking on the subject from an array of scholars and a must read for all educators. It is an important source for this research. Branson offers a bold theory that ethical action is essential to any claim of leadership and intends the proposition to "challenge the accuracy and comprehensiveness of our existing understanding of leadership" (p. 440).

While Branson argues that being ethical is a necessary condition of leadership, others understand and apply the concept of ethics and ethical leadership in diverse ways. This array may or may not be helpful to a principal working to inform their own understanding and actions through the application of theory and research. How might a leader best construct a workable mental model based on the theories and recommendations available? Insight into how practising principals might do that is important to this research project and an overview of the core concept of the 'ethical' informs that exploration. This section concentrates particularly on the concept of the ethical as it is applied to school leadership in particular. 'School' and 'educational' are sometimes used synonymously, thus missing the unique qualities of schools as organisations and systems as discussed in Part A. This section includes literature that pays particular attention to leadership in schools.

Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed and Spina, (2015) provide that focus in their research. They define "ethical leadership as a social, relational practice concerned with the moral purpose of education" (p. 197). They note that "ethics is about relationships with others" (p. 198) and, in the professional context of schools, leaders act fairly and justly and are viewed as caring, honest, and principled. They "promote values such as inclusion, collaboration, and social justice when working with staff and students alike" (p. 198). These traits and behaviours are commonly

included in descriptions of school leadership and some are explored in depth in this project. Their definition rests on the concept of moral purpose of education. Bezzina and Tuana (2014) note that "moral purpose is a term widely used in the literature but seldom defined" (in Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 283). They offer the view that "moral purpose can be understood as the commitment to ends that express underlying values and ethics" and in the particular context of schools the commitment is "ultimately to the transformation of the learner into a fuller, richer, deeper human being" (p. 283).

Starratt writes extensively about ethical and moral school leadership. He makes an important point in the context of this research project when he notes the importance on ongoing compassionate critique of the concepts and how they are interpreted in practice (1991, 2005, 2007, 2014). This critique must include compassion in that is recognising the constantly changing nature of making choices for action. He notes in his chapter in Bogotch and Shields that compassion is necessary because "in the complexity of contemporary life, making ethical choices often means making a choice between what appears to be two or more ethical 'goods' or between two or more ethical 'bads'" (2014, p. 73). This ongoing necessity for continual critique of choices and the reasons for them is that, according to complexity leadership theory, responses can be only partially informed by facts and technical skill and that

> when we have studied the nature of complex systems we see that uncertainty is fundamental and not simply the result of lack of information. Therefore, we are faced with real limitations on our ability to understand these systems through better information or measurement technologies. (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005, p. 3).

It may be concluded from this that hard choices are made collectively through the consideration of purposes and consequences rather than merely collection and evaluation of evidence. The degree to which these considerations are informed explicitly by ethics depends on the quality of the ethical leadership.

Starratt (2010, 2012, 2014) offers a clear difference between the meaning of ethical and moral. This is useful in this research given that the terms are often used as synonyms and where the distinction may provide a valuable clarity in this project exploring how principals respond to ethical dilemmas. The data collection and

analysis do not deal with such differences because no participant raised definition of them as important. It may be that using the terms interchangeably has no perceived negative impact on participants' efficacy and effectiveness. Alternatively, a lack of distinction between the terms may be seen as evidence of the view that conscious or public attention to the ethical/ moral dimensions is dangerous because of the contested nature of the meanings of ethical language and the potential for unresolved conflict. For example, in this researcher's experience, it is common for discussion about values, ethics, or moral behaviour to be constrained and confused by mixing up the terms and by the assertion that everyone's values/ ethics/ morals are different and who's to decide which ones will apply?

Starratt's (2014) distinction is that an ethical decision requires that one not only recognises something as ethical, but they can also "present a reasoned argument why it is consistent or inconsistent with human felicity and flourishing" (p. 74). He distinguishes that from a moral decision as one that follows "the rules imposed by a community" (p. 74) and made out of conformity to a law. For him, an ethical decision requires an intelligibility. Distinguishing moral behaviour as that which follows social conventions or mores and ethics as a personal or shared construction may or may not be useful in guiding professional practice. In the process of making choices, an individual or a group might need to decide if one takes precedence over the other and the distinctions may contribute little in deciding the rightness or otherwise of an argument.

This intelligibility and conscious consideration that Starratt identifies are important characteristics of the process of co-construction through sensemaking between the agents, when schools are understood as complex adaptive social systems This research explores some of this when it considers how agents understand the school as a system and how this understanding may affect the co-construction of the shared ethical sensibility in the school.

Professional ethic and professional practice as leadership theories

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) argue for a distinct "paradigm for professional ethics" (p. 23) for education leadership in their multiple paradigm model. They argue that generic ethics content does "not provide an adequate picture of the factors that must

be taken into consideration as leaders strive to make ethical decisions within the context of educational settings" (p. 19) and must also make sense of their own personal and professional codes of ethics. They argue that it is important for educational leaders to develop their own personal codes based on "life stories and critical incidents" that have led them to gain "a sense of who they are and what they believe personally and professionally" (p. 23). That understanding and the interactions between the private self and the public officer are important themes the literature review, although examples explored do not find tensions between the two. The participating principals do not identify a tension in the interview data, and it is not represented in the narratives and findings.

The unique nature of schools is also offered as a reason for a distinct professional ethic that is more than the sum of justice, critique and care. This uniqueness of schools is proposed in this thesis' criteriological inquiry and Shapiro and Stefkovich cite the work of Greenfield who argues that schools are "fundamentally a moral institution" and therefore the "public school administrator, because of the office held if for no other reason, is a moral agent" (Greenfield, 1991, p. 2). Greenfield's position is that school leadership has a profound moral dimension because of the moral complexity and issues and dilemmas present in the school and because of the school's moral purposes. Shapiro and Stefkovich use this argument to support the need for a distinct professional ethic and analysis. Some analysis in this review of how others understand 'professional' explores the degree to which that term contributes much illumination to the essential nature of the work.

Starratt's approach to what it means to be professional and ethical, with a particular emphasis on teaching, is an opportunity to consider some ways in which concepts associated with professional practice and wisdom are handled in the literature. 'Professional' is widely used both as a noun and an adjective, usually with assumed and unexplored meaning. There are some meanings particularly valuable to this research and some that compound confusion. The regulatory meanings associated with professional codes of conduct and professional standards are considered in that section.

It can be argued that confusion is fed when descriptions of professional rely on terms such as integrity and autonomy that stand alone, without clarification or explanation. For example, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) include acting with

integrity as a professional norm (p. 21) along with "fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning and continuous improvement" (p. 21). Integrity is identified as a separate attribute and therefore has unique and important qualities that are not explained. The assumed common meaning is that the person adheres strongly to an ethical code, but that leaves the definition of a professional as someone with professional integrity to a range of circular arguments. They may adhere to a formal code of conduct in which acting with integrity is listed. Alternatively, the code to which they adhere in their role may be their own personal one. Hitler, it therefore could be argued, had integrity on both counts.

Internal goods define a practice

Starratt's willingness to base the ethic of leadership on a philosophy argument is shared by others through the shared use of MacIntyre's (2007) concept of a practice to explore what is necessary, or 'good' in the nature of teaching and "leading an ethical educating process" (Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 59) as a consequence. Cooper (1987), Cranston, Ehrich and Kimber (2006), and Murphy (2016), all identify the value of MacIntyre's conceptualisation to understanding school leadership that expressly avoids use of the term professional. MacIntyre did not directly apply the idea to schools or education leadership and only a few education writers venture beyond their immediate field to explore its relevance to school leadership.

Cooper's (1987) description of concept of practices, written for the "practice of public administration" (p. 320), provides a summary consistent with the school focus of Starratt, Murphy, and Cranston. He observes that MacIntyre's concept of ethics is a useful perspective for analysing "the ethical differences inherent in the hierarchical relationships of modern organisations" (p. 321). He says that MacIntyre's focus on "practices" rather than "professions" is more appealing and constructive because it is a "larger framework within which to develop a normative perspective for public administration" (p. 321). This normative perspective is framed in part by the 'internal goods' of, as in this research, school principalship. They are the goods or benefits that can only be realised by the practice of school principalship. It is these goods, achievable only by the practice of school principalship, that identify the uniqueness of that practice and are therefore essential to it. Kristinsson, in *The*

essence of Professionalism (in Branson & Gross, 2014), supports the need for "an interpretive framework that contains normative assumptions referring to a morally legitimate foundational purpose, moral ways of pursuing it and an independent commitment to professional standards" rather a "value-neutral understanding of the concept of a profession" (p. 20).

Forster (2012) specifically examines professional ethics in teacher and principal contexts and adds insights valuable for this research. She notes that the concept of professional is not neutral in that the term "legitimises existing powers and authorities and validates particular discourses" (p. 2). This offers an explanation of teacher and principal decisions defended by the use of this construct of professional. For example, 'this is my professional decision' in response to student or parent concerns. This review explores professional codes and standards as part of the conceptual attainment tools used to understand what it means to be ethical and Forster makes the point that "professional standards are different from ethical standards in the sense that professional practice is not always ethical practice" (p. 1). While this difference may apply to lawyers and their treatment of witnesses, it is argued that in school teaching and leadership there is a consistent requirement to judge behaviour on "the contribution that the profession makes to human flourishing" (p. 2).

Murphy adds MacIntyre's "human flourishing" (2016, p. 81) as a purpose for living and also driving practice. That locates what is commonly described as the professional practice of school leadership as an ethical endeavour. MacIntyre's account of human flourishing "consist of people becoming independent practical reasoners, able to use their rational powers for the pursuit of a meaningful life" (Bielskis & Mardosas, 2014, p. 185). That explanation brings one to reflection on "a meaningful life" and interpretations of that are enabled in the research questions. Murphy also notes that this "human flourishing results not from individual freedom, but from working within 'practices" (p. 81) that MacIntyre describes as "coherent complex forms of socially established co-operative human activity" (p. 175). Schools certainly fit that description and it aligns closely with this study's characterization of school's as complex adaptive social system.

Starratt (2007) explores "the good intrinsic to the work, intrinsic to the practice of the profession" of education leadership and explores connections between

the “moral agenda of learners to the intrinsic morality of learning” (p. 166) and that offers new directions for thinking about the ethics of schools and leadership. The theme of exploring school learning as a moral activity as well as an intentional one appears not to have attracted research and writing attention in this field away from the self-referencing themes that dominate current texts and Starratt’s appears not to have been taken up by others. A key finding of the interview data is that principals see learning as a fundamental ethic of leadership.

Starratt (2010) does touch again on this theme in another article when he applies the ‘good’ of teaching and leadership in Davies and Brundrett (2010) to comment on themes important in this research. He notes that professional learning for teachers and leaders “needs to advance to a more concerted focus on the ethics of the profession of education which is to promote the moral good of teaching and learning” (p. 36). His view is that this has been neglected and that “leaves the teaching and learning process to float free in supposed ethical neutrality.” While ethical management of schools is a legitimate concern, the “profession, by and large, has yet to address” these goods of teaching and learning (p. 36).

This added dimension of the nature of the ethical leadership that includes the process of teaching and learning was valuable in exploring the ethical dilemmas participants chose for reflection and the degree to which the learning process itself figured in their thinking. The inquiry into principal perceptions was conducted after this literature review and finding from the data confirmed that teaching and learning are central to what it means to be an ethical leader. Starratt’s position is supported by the principals’ beliefs and practice.

Codes and standards for school principals

This section explores the formal frameworks for profession practice in which Tasmanian government school principals operate. These are identified and broadly described as a resource for informing the interviews and analysing the data. The interviews probed for levels of awareness of formal codes and standards and any influences they have on participants’ approaches to responding to ethical dilemmas and this section establishes a context for that. The sources identified are:

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals. AITSL

The Tasmanian Teachers Registration Board's Code of Professional Ethics for the Teaching Profession in Tasmania.

The State Service Act 2000, Tasmanian Government.

Forster, (2012) provides a comprehensive perspective of codes of ethics in Australian education that includes observations relevant to the tensions and paradoxes identified in this study. She explores tensions represented through the codes between "problems of individual autonomy, regulatory control and collective integrity" and the ways they variously characterize teachers as "a professional, as a moral agent and as a public servant" (p, 0). This analysis provides a useful framework for data collection and interpretation. Her paper establishes two broad purposes for codes and standards; aspirational and regulatory and some evidence of how principals see their purposes and value in their own practice may emerge in the data.

The codes and regulations relevant to Tasmanian teachers fit this characterization and tend to be a mixture of both. Their value as either appears limited by the assumed meanings of terms and lack of clarity regularly raised in this review. The Tasmanian State Services Act includes a Code of Conduct introduced by the requirement that employees must behave honestly and with integrity (State Service Act 2000) and includes some specific behaviours considered to be breaches of the Code. It is implied that integrity must have some unique qualities other than those specifically identified in addition to integrity, including care, diligence, respect, and no harassment, victimisation, or discrimination.

The Tasmanian Integrity Commission references the Act to describe its purpose as improving the "standard of conduct, propriety and ethics in public authorities in Tasmania" (Integrity Commission website). While integrity is left as a noun without explanation, it appears that the common sense meaning is typically a unity between practices and standards in which a person of integrity follows the rules and avoids corruption and, when rules do not apply, can be counted upon to act ethically.

The Teachers Registration Board (TRB) of Tasmania provides a Code of Professional Ethics for the Teaching Profession in Tasmania that is both aspirational and can be used to determine disciplinary action. It offers the principles of dignity,

respect, integrity, empathy and justice as underpinning the identity of the teaching profession and states that these are implicit in the professional conduct of teachers. This code offers plain language explanations of each of these terms that speak directly to the ethical nature of teaching in schools through links to traditional philosophical positions including the intrinsic worth of all persons and the common good (TRB website).

According to the TRB "teachers honour the principle of integrity by acting impartially and responsibly and by being honest, trustworthy and accountable with regard to the obligations that concern the profession" (TRB, np). This is an example of a similar approach taken to the five principles and offers an elegant and comprehensive guide to responding to ethical dilemmas included as a tool in the data collection and analysis.

The Australian Professional Standard Principals (the Standard) is a recent addition to the landscape of descriptors of what it means to be a principal and how they are used as normative and necessary requirements in Tasmania is evolving. There is national agreement that they capture what is required to be a principal and the Profiles that accompany them are being used to judge principal performance. "Vision and Values" (AITSL, 2014, p. 22) is identified as one the three foundations requirements of all leaders including principals and is the one most relevant to this study's focus on responding to ethical dilemmas. Again, the interviews looked for ways in which participants were guided by the Standards. They require the principal to commit to the common and well established priorities of "fairness, ethical practice, and democratic value" and state that the principals must be committed to "serve the best interests of the community" (p. 23). Shapiro and Stefkovich's theory of the school's ethical purpose of the best interests of the student appears to offer an alternative vision. The vision and values section of the Standard states that "principals behave with integrity underpinned by moral purpose. They model values and ethical perspectives in relation to their own and the school's practice and organisation" and "model democratic values including active citizenship and inclusion" (p. 23). These concepts and assertions are not explored further in the document and, therefore, one for the three foundations of leadership is left as statement of one paragraph and three dot points.

Conclusions

The literature review critiques contemporary education leadership literature on a number of grounds. Several of these tentative positions are explored in the examples explored in the review. They include:

Awareness of ethical conduct and practice and the level of importance placed on ethical practice in schools.

Perceptions in schools of efficacy and skill levels in responding to ethical dilemmas.

How ethics is understood in schools and how ethical priorities are decided.

Views about the value of ethical leadership literature.

Awareness of schools as systems and evidence of complicated and complex systems in action.

This literature review offers a negative view of some of the ethics and leadership literature because it ignores complexity theory, and for the ways it appears to either not respect or understand the day to day practice and motivation of those working in schools. There are powerful exceptions, but the general trend appears to be one of taking ideological positions on ethical conduct and then describing for leaders how they can implement them. Case studies are now popular in contemporary texts and some offer principals opportunities to reflect on their own professional circumstances. However, often they are based on preconceived metaphors and system models that do not fit the daily reality of schools. This argument, as outlined in the review, is tested in the interview data analysis .

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology

Overview of chapter

This chapter identifies the theoretical framework for the methodologies selected for the research and the relevance of the theories and methodologies to the research questions and the school context. The first part of the paper is an overview, with an introduction to the research questions, the field of research, and methodologies used. An exploration of the theoretical framework in relation to the school context follows and there is consideration of how the methodology accommodates the choices, tensions, strengths and limitations of the study.

The following questions framed the inquiry. The overall research question is:

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

The specific research questions are:

RQ1. ***What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?***

The criteriological inquiry conducted through the literature review addresses this question.

RQ2. ***How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?***

- ***a. How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
- ***b. How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***
- ***c. How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?***

These questions explore particular aspects of a potentially large field of study. The criteriological inquiry part of the research discussed concludes that there is little relevant research available on these questions and the field of study is largely unexplored. That has guided the methodology and the selection of theoretical characteristics adopted in the framework. A consequence of the limited research in this field of study is the exploratory and phenomenological approach taken, with an emphasis on seeking to describe and understand behaviour as expressed by the

research participants. The complex adaptive social systems model developed in this study guides exploration of the participating principals' system thinking. A generic leadership theory framework partners the model and a more specific ethical school leadership framework. These are both used as tools for describing the professional practice of principals and the ethical motivations and priorities that emerge in the research data.

The following diagram outlines the flow of the research design and methodology and relationships between the research questions, the inquiry methods and the organisation of the data analysis and findings and discussions.

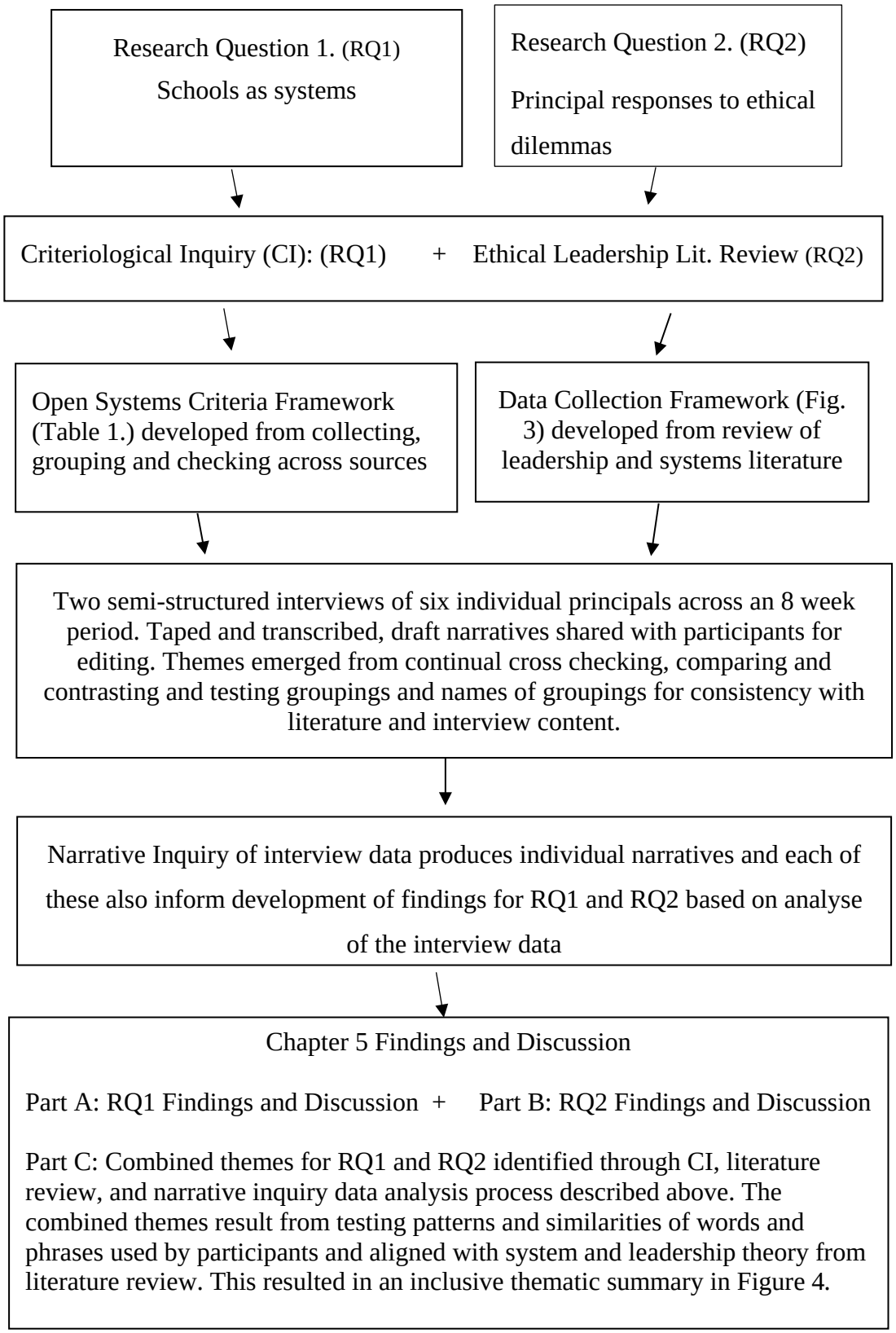

Figure 2. *Research Design and Methodology Overview*

Philosophical worldviews

The term ‘worldview’ is used by Creswell (2014) and will be used in this research project in preference to ‘paradigms’, ‘ontologies’ and ‘epistemologies’ unless a precise meaning is intended. The reason for this is the accessibility of the word ‘worldview’ in communication with participants and audience. The phrase ‘mental model’ is similarly used in reference to principals’ understanding of how parts of the school, broadly defined work together. “Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p.8). The research project must examine contested meaning of complex concepts and what people consider straightforward language will be used. A worldview is the general philosophical position one holds to explain and understand the world and a mental model specifically relates to the school and the relationships identified by the participants. A researcher brings those orientations to their own work and that influences the choices a researcher makes (Creswell, 2014). Making these worldview lenses as evident as possible assists the researcher to understand their own particular biases and preferences and provides the audience of the research with additional information for understanding the research process. This researcher has developed a particular worldview and mental model of schools as complex adaptive social systems that now accompanies the view that schools have important ethical purposes. The latter view comes from a career as a teacher and principal and the former view has been developed during this research.

These preconceived positions must be countered in three ways. First, evidence of that bias is considered in the semi-structured interviews and probe questions. Second, data analysis must take particular account of contrary evidence and finally, the principal narratives and the findings must reflect the range of views presented in the data. The research questions create a research environment requiring the application of several worldviews. The ethical dilemma focus of the questions, the two semi-structured interviews and the application of the literature review findings in interview data analysis contribute to a mixture of social constructivism and pragmatism as clearly outlined by Creswell (2014).

The principals as the agents at the centre of the research were invited to reflect on their ethical decision-making in what is described earlier in the *Theoretical Models* section as a complex adaptive social systems model and it is further argued that schools are a particular form of this complex system. Social constructivism holds that individuals develop subjective meaning for their experiences through their relationships with others. These meanings, in a complexity concept context, emerge in the space in which the agents interact in response to their circumstances. While individuals bring their own worldviews to this interaction, the choices for action made by individuals and the group are continually re-constructed by that interaction in a process of "sensemaking" (Weick, 1995, 2005). The qualitative approach provides the potential to be agile enough to describe how the principals understand this process and their role in it. A requirement in this constructivist research is to "address the processes of interaction among individuals" and to focus on the "specific contexts in which people live and work" (Creswell, 2014, p. 6).

A potential irony of this constructivist approach is to notice and describe the participant's own worldview that may be positivist/ postpositivist in that they may hold the position that cause and effect can be known, observed and that the role of the leader can be described with clarity in the context of formal authority. This worldview of a principal may lead them to assume control of a formal decision making process as commonly described in role descriptions and professional responsibilities. Crotty (1998), notes that

> Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives – we are born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture…The basis generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community (as cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 9)

The literature on ethical schooling and ethical leadership is based on a transformative view that schooling and schools exist to represent and pursue improvement in society (Dewey, 1904). The literature review examines this in some detail and priorities such as equity, social justice, democracy, freedom, and individual rights and responsibilities are commonly included as the required aims of ethical leadership. Recent literature includes "critique" as characteristic of ethical leadership practice and this situates the focus of this research within the transformative worldview that

holds that “issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression and alienation” (Bogoth & Shields, 2014, p. 10) must be addressed.

This research does not address those latter issues in the sense of acting to oppose them. The focus of the research is how principals understand and respond to issues such as these as they arise in the form of ethical dilemmas. The priority is to represent the voices and views of the principals and compare them against the findings of the literature review.

Research approach

Theoretical perspectives for the study

Engaging school principals in personal reflection about their professional decision making practice requires a qualitative inquiry. The research focus of reflection on ethical dilemmas supports the appropriateness of a qualitative rather than a quantitative or mixed method approach. How a principal responds to the inevitable complexity of such dilemmas requires an approach open to noticing, exploring and potentially suggesting credible themes describing their leadership principles and behaviour. This social construction of meaning is negotiated in a web of threads of philosophical and ontological beliefs spun from diverse standpoints. Exploring the human behaviour identified relevant to the research questions is “bound to the context in which it occurs” and that “social reality cannot be reduced in the same manner as physical reality and what is most important … is understanding and portraying the meaning that is constructed by the participants involved” (Ary et al., 2013). Ary goes on to note that qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret human and social behaviour as it is lived in a particular social setting (p. 447) and “freely admits the subjective perceptions and biases of both participants and researcher” (p. 447).

Phenomenological research “describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon described by the participants” (Creswell, 2014). The narratives and the findings derived from the data will represent what Creswell calls “the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (p. 14). The interviews with six single principals as cases to produce

individual narratives together with an analysis of the combined interview data must consider the phenomena as "observable events that a person experiences rather than intuits" (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2010, p. 198).

While the phenomenological approach attempts to capture what the participants describe from their point of view "with as few preconceived notions or influences from the researcher as possible" (p. 199), the rigour required includes probing for explanations deeper than superficial opinion and habitual labelling that may be represented in commonly used terms. The semi-structured interviews and invitations to expand on ideas will not generally include normative definitions, including a definition of ethics and ethical. In the particular circumstances of this research, the experience from the first round of interviews led to outlining for the participants the concept of complicated and complex systems in preparation for the second interview.

Research design as theory in action

The theoretical framework of this study has a direct impact on the methodology. Clarity about the theoretical framework, or at least a reasonable understanding of the challenges and limitations raised by theoretical assumptions, are particularly significant in the research. The ways in which the principals interpret theories and apply them through actions provide data for the research questions. This theoretical framework or network has four main threads. They are:

1. Social systems theory and systems thinking.
2. Leadership theory applied to generic leadership practice.
3. Ethical school leadership theory.
4. Philosophical approaches most appropriate to ethical leadership action in schools.

While school leadership literature, as demonstrated in the literature review, most often unconsciously characterizes schools as complicated systems that can be controlled through top down authority and professional knowledge, the open social systems theory characterizes schools as organisations with uncertain boundaries and networks of interconnected relationships with government agencies and diverse services and interest groups. Formal regulations and school based customs guide

these relationships. Principals and school staff have professional roles and responsibilities that broadly define how they should act in response to the events that require their attention. Theory and literature describing what it means to be an ethical leader are available to inform practice, and governments and employer agencies provide formal rules guiding behaviour.

The school leadership literature explored in this study is based largely on unstated interpretations of schools as complicated systems that can be led and managed by centralised authority, formal structures and decision-making procedures and professional expertise that can solve problems if sufficient skills and facts are applied. The criteriological inquiry has established that schools are complex adaptive social systems. Principals' interpretations of these competing theories are an important focus in this research. The influence of school leadership literature on leadership practice and the consequences of its lack of attention to complex system theory is a particular focus.

The particular nature of ethical school leadership receives attention in literature directed towards education leaders. This literature is particularly important to the research methodology because it offers a language and particular words and concepts that frame contemporary descriptions of what ethical practice looks like. Authentic, sustainable, caring, autonomy, empathy, self, and justice (Bottery, 2004; Branson & Gross, 2014; Gross & Shapiro, 2015; Haynes, 1998) are common concepts in the literature and how they are used and understood by school leaders guides the data collection and exploration. Principals' awareness of this body of literature and the value they place on it by is a thread of inquiry.

The principals' explicit awareness of traditional philosophical concepts and thinkers is also a potential focus in the interviews. Participant descriptions and interpretations of core concepts including justice, virtue, fairness, rights, and responsibilities will be considered through the interpretive lens of MacIntyre (2007) and the writers and researchers included in the literature review.

Criteriological inquiry

Criteriological inquiry has a particular meaning for the purposes of this research. The specific term is not examined in literature and is adapted from criteriology (Seale,

1999) for use in this thesis. It is an inquiry approach that seeks to identify criteria commonly used in describing social systems. The literature review tests the level of agreement about the nature of open social systems and draws conclusions about the high level of agreement on the criteria that distinguish open social systems from other sorts of systems. This inquiry into the criteria, or characteristics, identified in the research into social systems identifies a number of agreed characteristics of social systems and those characteristics form a suite of elements used to judge the nature of schools as a type of system.

The conclusion, represented in the Open Systems Criteria Framework, that schools are a complex adaptive social system is a foundational theory for this research and leads to several of the research questions. The research methodology is strongly influenced by the nature of schools, as organisations where leadership is seen as "influence" (Lichtenstein et al., 2006) that consists of relationships between people, where the boundaries are open and unclear, where actions and ethical priorities are negotiated according to circumstances, and where consequences can be unpredictable. These characteristics, described in more detail in Chapter 2 Part A, also establish categories for a content analysis approach to interview data that includes establishing systematic links between the categories (Silverman, 2013) and in locating beliefs and understanding according to the complicated system and complex system comparison.

In summary, the inquiry into the criteria that appear to reflect accurately the daily life of schools has established a description of how schools operate as systems. The Open Systems Criteria Framework provides a comparison guides for the questions and the research methodology. This relationship is considered later in more detail.

Criteriological inquiry appears to be an uncommon term in research literature and therefore requires some examination. The term may be uncommon, but the approach is standard; clarify and justify the boundaries, features, elements of what you are examining enough to know it when you see it, and then describe it with some credibility. For example, descriptions of critical thinking are examples of identifying criteria that distinguish higher order thinking from uniformed opinions (Paul & Elder, 2013).

Criteriology is a known approach that captures much of criteriological inquiry. (Seale, 1999) for example examines criteriology and the criticisms of positivist attempts to impose constructed realities through external criteria on what is being observed. This research methodology of identifying and applying criteria may be subjected to that criticism in the same way that those who offer criteria for judging quality in qualitative research are tested according to Seale, although he noted then that influential researchers had begun to take a constructivist approach rather than a positivist one. Seale examines Lincoln and Guba's 1985 work as evidence of this shift and others to be added to that shift may include Creswell (2014), Silverman (2010, 2013), and Thomas (2015), all of whom identify characteristics of what they are prepared to identify as quality research. These researchers are influential in this study and their approaches to provide credibility (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 1985) are applied.

A criticism of criteriology that may be reasonable does not apply to this research project. The criteria are not theoretical constructs developed as ideas and then imposed as a means of deciding the value of whatever they are observing. They are transparently derived in the literature review from multiple sources and from research done in many different locations over decades. Whether or not they are erroneously positivist is a question beyond this study. The approach taken in this study is largely constructivist and that approach is examined further.

The research strategy of a case study approach

The research focus in this study is the "phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2014, p.14) where the phenomenon is how school principals respond to ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools. The thinking of each of six principals about that phenomenon are the individual cases that contribute data about the phenomenon through a cross case analysis that identifies patterns and themes. This analysis produces findings and discussion that make contributions to understanding of the research questions.

The study is similar to what Stake (2000) describes as a "collective case study where a number of cases are studied in order to investigate some general phenomenon" (as cited in Silverman, 2013, p. 143). The "boundaries that will give

meaning and characterization" (O'Leary, 2014, p. 196) include the six Tasmanian school principals and their perceptions of the nature an ethical dilemma and their responses to them. Particular characteristics, including gender and qualifications, are not addressed in the study and these limitations to the study are identified in the section on limitations to the study.

Understanding of schools as systems and the nature of an ethical leadership are boundaries guiding the interview questions. The nature of the semi-structured interviews encouraged interviewees to respond in ways most appropriate for them, guided by interviewer questions or prompts based on the priorities identified in the *Data Collection Framework* (Figure 3). The responses followed similar patterns and each one contained unique elements and the narrative inquiry approach was the most appropriate approach given the range patterns, threads of thinking, and word choices. These factors are considered further in the narrative inquiry and interview sections.

A case study research approach is particularly suited to the research questions and theoretical frameworks of the study as described in the theoretical perspectives section above. The data collection methods of semi-structured interviews and narrative inquiry support a necessary emphasis on understanding what is going on (Thomas, 2015) in relation to the principals' thinking about ethical dilemmas and how they understand ethical behaviour within the school culture.

Conducting interviews for the purposes of compiling studies of individual cases and conducting analysis across each one is a typical approach to qualitative and phenomenological research (Creswell, 2014). Cresswell notes the value of this approach and cites Stake (1995) and Yin (2007, 2013) as consistent with that view. Cross-case analysis involves "an examination of more than one case; this can be either a variable-oriented or case-oriented analysis" (Babbie, 2015). Each individual principal contributes data to the analysis of the phenomenon of principals' responses to ethical dilemmas. This study applies the interview data to two purposes. The interviews of each individual are analysed to produce a narrative description of their thinking about the phenomenon and the combined interview response data are used to develop findings that identify themes across all of the data. A variable-orientated approach is required to explore the data to identify shared characteristics, emerging themes and possible generalisations, while the principal narratives provide a coherent representation of their unique perceptions and responses to the questions.

Contemporary literature identifies several conditions justifying the use of a case study research approach that is particularly relevant to this research. These justifications demonstrate relevance and fit to the research questions and they are examined in several of the examined texts. In summary:

- A case study research approach is useful if you want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case (Yin & Davis, 2007).
- A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (Yin, 2013).

- A case study research approach is appropriate when the questions are how and why, there is no control of behavioural events and the focus is on contemporary events (Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2013).

This contingent, contextual, and flexible approach to data collection aligns closely to this study's characterisation of the complexity, variety and unpredictability of everyday life in schools.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that uses stories or narratives as resources to understand people's experiences. There is an important distinction between story and narrative and about how story and narrative are used for the purposes of this research (Reismann, 2008, p. 6). Clandinin (2006) notes that stories become part of the way an organisation understands itself and the story is passed between people as "a narrative previously produced" (p. 390). The narrative inquiry approach is represented in the semi-structured interview questions and generated as unique responses over the course of two interviews. Participants are not asked to retell a story already formed. The interviews include invitations to recall and reflect and the interviewer is the audience. To that extent, it is not a story with a known plot, characters and structures but a narrative that is a new combination of events, points of view and emphasis, guided by the questions.

The interview responses are treated as “actively constructed narratives” rather than sources “giving direct access to experience” (Silverman, 2013, p. 44). The focus is on describing what sense the participant makes of their experience for themselves. That includes framing the sensemaking by making the pre-determined themes of the analytical framework progressively more explicit to the participant over the two-interview process.

Another related issue requiring more detailed consideration is how the researcher will interpret the content of the stories. Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou note that the “rapid passing over of narrative language to get to narrative meaning or function is a broad trend in current narrative research” (2008, p. 207). That is not the approach taken in this research where the principals’ thinking is the research focus. The principals’ reflections, the words and metaphors they use, and the meaning they give them over time between and during two interviews are the important data. What matters is their own voices in each of the narratives and they are data sources in themselves.

This research makes use of complex systems leadership theory (Hazy et al., 2007) and a complex adaptive systems perspective on organisational theory that includes the ways in which agents talk together (Weick et al., 2005) to develop shared understanding of their experiences and make choices on how act, (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). People learn in and about complex systems through feedback (Sterman, 1994) and the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry directs attention to these characteristics.

Narrative inquiry is a compatible and complementary methodological approach to the conceptual themes of this research and the research questions. “In organisations, storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders” (Boje, 1991, p. 107) and these relationships are central to the research. For this thesis, the narrative inquiry includes both the approach to collecting the data and the production of the principal narratives (Clandinin, 2006).

Exploring the normality of uncertainty (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005) and ambiguity (Culmsee & Awati, 2013) of schools as complex social systems and the constant need to make contested ethical choices are also purposes of this research.

Sensemaking is the relevant and useful term used by Weick, et al., (2005) to explore this organisational environment. They also make the point that "the concept of sensemaking fills important gaps in organisational theory" (p. 409) and this issue of gaps in theory is noted often in this research. The ways in which they conceptualize sensemaking illuminates the key concept of schools as complex adaptive social systems in ways that the current dominant literature on school and ethical leadership does not. In particular, it describes sensemaking as "the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice" (p. 409) and it is this interplay in the uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability and nonlinear decision making in schools that the research questions explore. Narrative inquiry, with the addition of Weick's sensemaking model to assist with narrative analysis, offer a qualitative methodology sympathetic to the complexity of responding to ethical dilemmas and the nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems.

These principles guided the construction of the Chapter 4 principal narratives and the chapter begins with a description of how the narrative were constructed. How the principals chose to describe and make sense of the events they selected are priorities and their own voices and words are represented as authentically as possible. "Member checking" (O'Leary, p. 132), through providing participants with drafts for review, resulted in changes to specific facts in two narratives.

Data Collection

Research data in the thesis are of two types. One data set is the result of a criteriological inquiry into the nature of schools as complex systems. This literature study concludes that schools are complex adaptive systems as described in systems theory (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005) and the criteriological analysis in the thesis concludes that the 'social' element of schools is of such significance that they can be reasonably identified as a complex adaptive social system. The particular characteristics of complex adaptive social systems are used in the development of the interview process and data collection and analysis framework. They also inform the development of the overall research question:

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

Interviews of six school principals participating in a two stage semi-structured interview process are the source of the second data set. The first round of interviews was completed, data analysed, and follow up interviews were conducted to explore further any emerging themes.

The two data sets of the criteriological inquiry and the interviews inform each other through an iterative deductive-inductive process in the development of two conceptual analysis tools. One is the *Open Systems Criteria Framework* developed through the deductive criteriological analysis of leadership and system thinking literature. The other is the *Data Collection Framework* (Fig. 3) derived from the Open Systems Criteria Framework (Table 1) and used for the overall purpose of aligning the open systems criteriological inquiry with the research questions, the interview process, and the narrative inquiry methodology.

Data collection framework.

The data collection framework is the analytical framework (Silverman, 2013) through which the ethical dilemma aspect of the research is aligned with the nature of schools as complex social systems. It is developed from the findings of the criteriological inquiry and the ethical school leadership literature review.

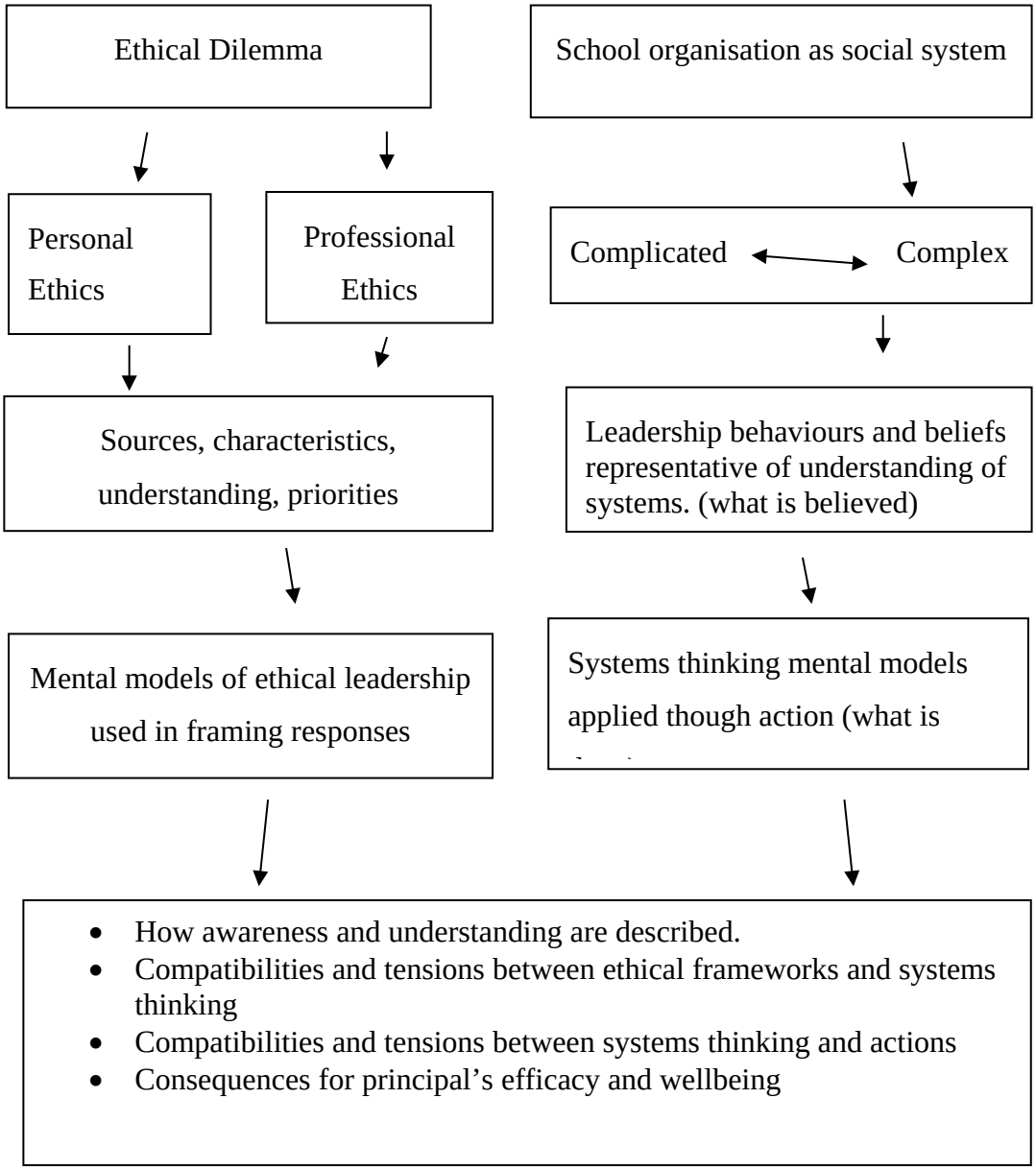

Figure 3. *Data Collection Framework*

Interviews

Six principals participated in in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The initial interview established the base line data and the purpose of the second was to describe what had changed from the principal's point of view about the what and how (Silverman, 2014) of their understanding and practice.

A constructivist approach was taken in these interviews in that the questions intentionally invite the participant to reflect on particular aspects of both the 'what' and 'why' of their actions and their thinking. This research generally, and the interviews in particular, do not take the naturalist position of what Silverman calls a "romantic impulse" to see an interview as an opportunity "for an authentic gaze into the soul of another" (2014, p. 182). Nor does it take a positivist view that a tightly controlled interview can identify facts about what people think and why they behave the way they do. What is most important in this research is what people believe may be the reasons for their actions and what they understand about how their beliefs, priorities, and motivations are influenced. The findings develop from the presented data and discussions are derived from the findings. The researcher's interpretations are transparent and subject to review and 'romantic impulses' are not used in defence of findings and discussion.

The suitability of a constructivist semi-structured approach is based on some assumptions derived from the literature review and personal professional experience. Explicit application of ethical priorities in making leadership choices does not appear to be a common approach and people may not deliberately or explicitly reflect on their motivations, or priorities in their everyday work. People are not necessarily conscious of the ethical priorities and choice in play as they make decisions.

It follows then that interviewees may not come to the interview with a conscious and explicit knowledge of the why and how of what they do, and the interview is an uncommon opportunity for them to be heard and to reflect in a safe and structured environment. The interview provided them with opportunity to make the implicit more explicit and the time and support to reflect. This potential learning process aspect of the interview was a main reason for the follow-up interview. This process of reflection stimulated by the initial interview meant that elements of unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews were appropriate at different

stages (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Differences between the first and second interviews are discussed in Chapter 5.

The relationship between the research and participants is an issue considered extensively in the literature. Referring particularly to naturally occurring data, (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) observe that there is no pure data and others note that all data are mediated by our own reasoning as well as that of the participants (Potter, 2002). Interviews in particular may test the capacity of the researcher to be aware of bias an unconscious influence and a danger in the use of interviews as they arise in unstructured circumstances. To avoid expectations or interventions that risk the value of interview data, the possibility of researcher becoming coach, mentor or consultant to the participant must be discussed. The preliminary discussions and designed interview process accommodated all of these factors.

The interview and data collection trial

The trial interview was with a primary school principal who was aware of the semi-structured approach (O'Leary, 2013) and that the questions were being trialled. The trial had several intended purposes. In addition, a range of unexpected things happened and that raises crucial aspects of narrative inquiry generally and semi-structured interviews in particular. The focus on narrative and the encouragement of reflection limited the capacity of the deductive thematic approach to name and code the words, motivations, and beliefs expressed in the trial. Listening to the participant as if for the first time several times over, in the analysis is necessary as part of the process of moving between the listening and transcript reading while putting the pre-determined themes aside (Silverman, 2014).

While the pre-determined guiding themes were useful in guiding and analysing the data from the initial interview, they are essential as a tool for identifying the foci for the follow-up interviews. They identified the data gaps that required more targeted questions and they identified tensions that required exploration. The trial raised the issue of how best to focus on a participant's understanding of their own systems thinking. The criteria established for behaviour that can plausibly (Mills et al., 2010) be attributed to complicated / complex system thinking was of limited value in interpreting the trial participant's responses. The

trial participant was clear about his ethical motivation, as was his understanding of the complexity characteristics of uncertainty, influence, and informal authority. This raised the need for the second interview to be based on a further exploration of these and other characteristics of systems thinking characteristics. That clarified the need to specifically address significant characteristics, emergence for example, depending on analysis of each individual's first interview.

The interview process

The learning from the trial was relevant in and during the interview process. The second interview stage included two particular additional elements. In each of the six cases, it was necessary to be explicit about the concept of systems thinking and the differences between complicated and complex thinking. This was introduced in each at the end of the first interview and described as an invitation to respond to the concept at the next interview. Participant responses to the deliberate introduction of systems thinking and complexity are described in the Findings summary; principals practice leadership in complexity. The initial analysis of the first interview data of all participants was conducted before the second round. That identified areas of inquiry specific to each individual and shared emerging theme that could be followed up in the second round.

Sample and participants

The sampling was a mixture of purposive sampling, non-random snowball and handpicked sampling (O'Leary, 2013; Silverman, 2013). Initial purposive sampling was guided by a balance of gender, primary and secondary schools and length of service in a principal role. Non-random and handpicked sampling followed as required to ensure balance across those requirements.

Samples decisions were made in the context of the research as an exploration of individual cases, not intended to produce generalizable results. The narrative inquiry of individual principal thinking is intended to contribute to the understanding about how principals understand the nature of their practical leadership experience. The literature review and the complex systems theory provide perspectives for the exploration of that understanding. Silverman's (2014) arguments justifying the value

of limited case studies and the appropriate treatment of them has been influential in this research. He refers to Seale (1999) and Flyvberg (2006) and their thinking has been influential. Silverman notes that “by thoroughly examining a small number of cases, the researcher may explore in-depth the contextual dimensions that influence a social phenomenon” (Silverman, 2104, p. 72), and that has been the intention of this research.

Six principals were “small enough to be manageable” (O’Leary, 2014, p. 182) and the sample was intended to be representative of the principal population in the sense that they were selected to represent a range of views or behaviours, determined through some preliminary investigation. They were representative in the broad sense of a balance of male and female, primary and secondary and at different stages of principal experience. Experience of schools in a range of socio-economic communities was also a factor. The sample was contained to the Department of Education, (DoE) Tasmania. There were no theoretical assumptions in this research that any of these factors would influence their responses to ethical dilemmas and questions did not explore those possibilities.

Primary data collection

The process of collecting, analysing and interpretation of “primary data” (O’Leary, 2014, p. 201) from the interviews was guided by the principles of credibility, plausibility, reliability and validity as they apply to qualitative research. Silverman (2014) identifies key features of each principle and they are each applied in this chapter.

All six first interviews were conducted over a 10 day period. The follow up interviews were all conducted six weeks later in a similar time frame. All participants were audio recorded. They were conducted in principal’s offices or at the university depending on their preferences. All the interviews were audio tape recorded and transcribed. That provided a foundation for testing the interpretations. “The attempt to generate credible knowledge lies at the basis of any dialogue” (Silverman, 2014, p. 78) and credibility is very important in this study. There is the risk that the narrative research approach can be questioned “by whether or not it produces valid knowledge” (p. 79). The steps described here addressed credibility and the transparency of argument provided by the principal’s narrative, and the explicit use

of the criteriological inquiry and the findings of the literature review. Silverman identifies “the tendency to select their data to fit an ideal conception (preconception) of the data” (p. 81) and the transparency and the data analysis steps are efforts to counter that risk.

Reliability

This description of the data analysis and interpretation addresses key features of reliability. Principals may not give the same responses if interviewed again by another person. However, the two interview stages, the informed second interview questions, and seeking feedback on the narrative drafts, were all steps to ensure their responses were considered and coherent expressions of their own thinking. In addition, the narratives and the findings can be compared and contrasted and the quotations in the findings are extensive and transparent (Silverman, 2014). The interview process and analytical tools were trialled (Silverman, 2014) and the researcher collected interviews as audio and transcribed all data.

Validity

Silverman (2014) notes the possibility of “spurious correlation” (p. 90) in both qualitative and quantitative research This research addresses the two criteria for validation of qualitative research. “Respondent validation” (p. 91) is directly addressed through the sharing of the narratives. “Triangulation” (p. 91) is not present in the sense of combining quantitative and qualitative data but the research method does use “different bearings to give the correct position of an object” (p. 91) through the two stages of interview separated by time and the two presentations of findings as narratives and through thematic analysis of data. These were subjected to several stages of narrative analysis at different times, with the express intention of testing assumptions and looking for contrary and divergent evidence.

The validity of the argument that schools are primarily complex systems is tested and argued in Chapter 2 through the literature analysis. Chapter 5 findings of the principals’ described experiences support that claim through the transparent use of the Open Systems Criteria Framework as an analytical tool as a reliable representation of the open systems theory applied to schools.

Finally, the interview findings are not presented as claims that they represent other principals' experience and understanding beyond the cases. It is argued that they are reliable and credible representations of those principals and therefore provide a valid foundation for further research and the development of professional development support for school principals.

Data collection, analysis and interpretation.

The date collection schedule is outline in the following table and then described in more detail.

Table 2. *Data Collection Schedule Overview*

PHASE	PERIOD	DATA SOURCES	DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY	SUMMARY FOCUS FOR DATA COLLECTION
Phase 1 • Criteriological Inquiry through literature review • Ethical school leadership review	2016	Literature: • Complex systems • Ethical leadership	• Criteriological Inquiry • Characteristics of ethical leadership • Ethical purposes of schools	• Development of Open Systems Criteria Framework • Interview question schedule • Data Collection Framework
Phase 2 Sample selection	Nov. 2016- Feb. 2017	Department of Education (DoE) principal data base DoE Principals	• Letter of invitation distributed. • 6 participants selected for balance across gender, primary/ secondary, experience	• Individual discussions held to clarify and describe process and scope of research and nature of participation.
Phase 3 First interview	March 2017	Six Principals	Researcher recorded individual semi-structured interviews	• Initial focus on describing an ethical dilemma to establish direction of semi-structured interview. • Introduce focus for 2nd interview
Phase 4 Transcripts and analysis of interview	March – April 2017	Recorded interviews	• Researcher transcribed interviews • Participants contacted to indicate individual areas for 2nd interview	• Identify themes and gaps in first interview for design of second interview.
Phase 5 Second Interviews	April 2017	Six principals	• Researcher transcribes	• Further reflection on notified areas. • Coverage of schedule and Framework • Complex systems reflections
Phase 6. Transcripts interviews	April – May 2017	Recorded interviews	• Researcher transcribes	• Compare 1st and 2nd for similarities, differences, understood shifts in views

PHASE	PERIOD	DATA SOURCES	DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY	SUMMARY FOCUS FOR COLLECTION
Phase 7 Draft narratives	August 2017	Combined interview data	• Narrative accurately expressing voice and views of participant. • To participants for edits and permission to use in thesis.	• Produce stand alone individual narratives • Test and clarify accuracy in describing each participant's views

Data analysis and interpretation

The process of analysing and interpreting data followed the steps outlined by Cresswell (2014). He describes coding as the process of organising the data collected during data collection by "bracketing chunks… representing a category" and "labelling categories with a term based in the actual language of the participant" (p. 198). Cresswell raises the issue of whether the researcher should "develop codes only on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants" (p. 199). The literature reviews of the systems literature and the ethical leadership literature suggested possible codes that may be relevant in the data analysis and their degree of relevance is noted where appropriate in Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion.

The process outlined generally follows Tesch's (1990) eight steps in the coding process (as cited in Creswell, 2014). The summary of steps for analysis of the set of transcriptions include;

- developing a general overview from reading all the transcripts and making initial observations about patterns,
- an initial identification of important words and phrases in each transcript,
- grouping these around potential similar themes and describe as strong, unique and leftover.
- testing the preliminary themes as appropriate organisers,
- suggesting and testing the most appropriate wording for the groupings.

This was an ongoing, simultaneous, and continuous process of testing patterns, categories, similarities, and differences. Interpretation of the data evolved during this process and that required the need to revisit transcripts in the light of new understanding. There was also a risk of making data fit emerging groupings and that required testing for contrary evidence and alternative descriptions. The development of individual narratives through analysis of each participant's two interviews and then the analysis of the combined interview data also meant that transcription data were analysed at different times for particular purposes.

Transcriptions of the first round of interviews were analysed first. A visual and physical identification using sticky notes was used rather than a software package, given the manageable amount of data. Individual transcripts were read several times and the key themes were identified to build a picture of their unique narrative. Shared words and similes, and similar expressions and descriptions from each were then broadly grouped and described in terms of inclusive categories, without being specific. This was an iterative process across data analysis of both interviews informed by the principles of narrative inquiry. The iteration involved first identifying words and phrases that appeared to address a research question or made connections across two or more questions. Words and phrases were also grouped in a variety of ways to test how they may fairly represent a particular view about schools as systems and an ethical perspective. Responses that fitted neither were also identified and tested for any data outside the *Open Systems Criteria Framework* and the *Data Collection Framework.*

The first stage interviews and cross-case analysis had two purposes. First, it provided a framework for the second individual interview for each participant. That included identifying gaps in data for the research questions and areas particular to each individual case that appeared worth exploring further. Secondly, the first stage analysis provided broad tentative directions across the cases that informed shared questions for the second interview. The data from the second round interviews were treated similarly to the first. First round themes were put aside as much as possible. The bias of the knowledge constructed so far was present, and attention was given to looking for contrary evidence and new phrases, words, and descriptions of understanding. As explored elsewhere, only one participant described how their thinking changed between interviews. The findings describe these changes.

The individual principal narratives were constructed from the second analysis of individual responses to both interviews. How each participant chose to respond and the content and main foci they brought to the first interviews supplemented the question framework in the design of second interview questions. These individual narratives contribute to the credibility and reliability of the data in that they are unique individual expressions that share some perceptions and beliefs about responding to ethical dilemmas.

Participants were given their draft narrative for response. Two minor changes of fact and one of clarifying meaning were required; otherwise, every principal approved them as a fair representation. Several noted that they were surprised to read about themselves in a way they had not experienced before and noted that the descriptions clarified aspects of their practice and belief they had not realised. Importantly, the feedback on the narratives indicated that the interpretations were reliable from the point of view of the participants.

The narratives were then put aside, and transcripts were read again with the experience of writing the narratives informing the reading. It was at this stage the key theme of learning as an ethic in itself emerged. Interpretations of evidence of complicated and complex thinking were also refined. All themes and interpretations were revisited and refined. Specific data from the transcripts was then allocated to themes and subgroups. This resulted in some minor reclassifications and descriptions and the main issue became the degree to which the findings should be grouped or separated. This issue is discussed in the introduction of Chapter 5 where a metaphor provided by a participant rang true: a bike can be taken apart and put back together, and still be a bike. A frog, however, cannot.

Methodology and Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion

Deciding the seven organisers

Seven organisers of the overall research findings are identified and discussed in Chapter 5 Part C: Synthesis of themes across all questions. They follow the findings for RQ1 and RQ2 and provide descriptions of overarching themes and connected concepts. The organisers follow the presentation of a summary of the criteriological inquiry findings, the interview findings, and supporting data. These are grouped according to the themes established as a result of the data analysis and interpretation process described in this section and that organisation then offers an overview of those findings. Six of the organisers group these themes under headings that describe the links between them and the seventh identifies some potential themes that were included in the interview questions but did not prompt responses in the participants.

The naming of the organisers involved repeating the process described for the initial interview data analysis of testing patterns, categories, similarities, and differences. The naming of organisers was particularly influenced by the observations derived from the literature reviews into schools as systems and ethical school leadership. The purpose of this approach was to provide a coherent and justifiable grouping that represented an overall summary of the combined research and offer productive possibilities for further research. This approach is consistent with Creswell's (2014) description of data analysis and interpretation that generate "perhaps five to seven themes for a research study" (p. 199) and are "the ones that appear as major findings in qualitative studies" (p. 200). These organisers attempt to serve both purposes.

Risks and limitations

The researcher was known to many experienced principals in the state system. He was a long standing senior officer until leaving the Tasmanian Department of Education in 2009 and has maintained involvement in the system as a part time teacher and consultant. The potential for subjective bias to affect adversely the credibility of the process and reliability of any generalisations is recognised. Several points are relevant here. The researcher acknowledged to principals that the nature of

principalship has changed significantly since he was a principal 18 years ago and line managed principals seven years ago.

The process required by the ethics application process of the University of Tasmania requires that participants are fully informed of the processes that enable them to withdraw consent at any time and ensure their confidentiality and protection from harm and risk. The Department of Education, Tasmania also requires approval through a formal application process. These steps were taken, and participating principals were provided with extensive explanations. Relevant forms are included in the Appendices.

Chapter 4. Principal Narratives

Introduction

These narratives are findings from the interviews presented as individual participant narratives. They capture the unique narrative threads of each individual rather than a retelling of stories that were familiar to the interviewees in the telling. The narrative inquiry description in Chapter 3 outlines the differences between story and narrative that emphasises narrative as new connections between ideas and actions.

The semi-structured interviews with the six participating principals provided them with an opportunity to reflect on aspects of their practice, often unexamined. Most observed that they had few opportunities to examine their actions in the way provided by the two interviews in which they were encouraged to explore and reflect, and not pressed to defend positions.

The structure of each narrative has some similarities due to the shared question structure and the themes that emerged during analysis. The purpose of the narratives is to present the unique voice of each individual and thereby provide a range of personalized interpretations of how principals respond to ethical dilemmas.

Findings and the literature review

The narratives provide data relevant to the themes developed in both Part A and Part B of the literature review. The data from interview is more specifically linked to these themes and Chapter 5 explores these themes through the combined interview data. These narratives offer evidence of those themes located in the individual cases of principal's exploring their thinking. They capture the ways in which the principals chose to describe what was most important and relevant to them in responding to the invitation to reflect on how they responded to an ethical dilemma.

These findings address key themes developed throughout the literature and commonly shared across the narratives. Several threads of investigation are woven into the criteriological inquiry and throughout this study and are noted at the beginning of the literature review. The summary of the literature review identified foci for investigation concerned with ethical principles and practice, awareness of ethical theory and literature, and awareness of system thinking.

Findings from the individual narratives

There are two broad themes evident across each narrative. These are described here and examined in more detail in Chapter 5, where specific data from the interview transcripts are used to address each of the research questions. This section frames the reading of the narratives and offers a descriptive introduction to the data driven findings of Chapter 5. It links some of the findings from the criteriological inquiry and observations in the literature review to the principals' reflections.

Theme 1: Leadership, practice or profession?

This theme identifies the concept of leadership as a practice and this is compared with the ways the concepts of principalship as a profession are preferred and described in the literature. The principals' narratives are evidence of their understanding of leadership as a practice rather than a profession. None of the principals gave emphasis to rules, job descriptions or the role of principal as one privileged through it being professional. They described principalship through the actions they took and the relationships they constructed with all the others in the school. They all described those actions in terms of ethical principles for leadership behavior and took the formal requirements of the role as givens. The ethical principles are enacted through their practical everyday actions. These are identified in detail in Chapter 5 and broadly include some foundational ethical principles explored in the literature review. They include the dignity of all persons, (Duignan, 2015; Murphy, 2013; Starratt, 2012), and learning as intrinsically moral (Starratt, 2007), as internal goods (MacIntyre, 2007) of their practice.

There are two areas of significant difference in the practice of their leadership and the theories raised by the literature review itself and much of the literature review. The literature review and the research questions raised the issue of conflict between the private self and the public, autonomous self, and the role of an employee of a controlling authority. The dominant view of all participants was that these potential conflicts do not exist in any significant way. The narratives describe a high degree of compatibility between their own views of ethical principles and practice and those of the Tasmanian Department of Education. There is also the same high

degree of compatibility between the priorities and values of the Department and the principals themselves and suggests no alignment with the view expressed by Bogoth and Shields (2014) that principals must act to advance social justice despite barriers created by central agencies. That was not because they did not value ethical action, as claimed by Branson (2014) in his observations about ethical leadership. On the contrary, they all believed themselves to be driven fundamentally by ethical practice as an essential element of principalship. Several echoed Branson in his view that it isn't leadership if it isn't ethical.

The other difference between the principals' view of ethical leadership and the literature is the lack of interest in concepts of integrity, intuition, and autonomy as descriptors of their understanding. It may be that the questions did not elicit views about these constructs, but they do not appear to be in narratives that the principals chose to share.

Theme 2: Wicked problems are the norm in schools

The nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems means that wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) are the norm. This theme summarizes the complexity threads of this thesis and they are reflected in every narrative. While the principals were not explicitly aware of their system thinking, the narratives are descriptions of leaders applying some principles of adaptive leadership with a range of conscious awareness. Only one was aware of the term 'adaptive leadership' and none had considered that their practice represented leadership consistent with schools as complex adaptive social systems. There was no mention of education leadership literature, and there was very little mention of professional learning focused on leadership as a practice beyond leading the improvement of teaching. The differences between the leadership literature's focus on complicated systems rather than complex ones that takes up so much of the literature review was not an issue for them.

Narrative 1: John

John has been a principal in a variety of schools for over a decade and they have included country and city schools at primary and secondary level. He described himself as a teacher who became a principal. He never wanted to be one but found himself in a school situation that tested and clarified his ethical priorities and he began constructing the framework of his ethical practice as a principal. Several ethical challenges in other schools since that first role deepened and expanded that framework and practice to a point where John has a strong sense of a particular ethical framework of principalship beyond that of a classroom teacher but remaining true to the core principle of 'doing the right thing by everybody.' For John, the magnitude and complexity of relationships in the principal role means that what "happens in the sub-conversations" the principal does not know about can mean that "things can go boom in your face and you're left wondering where that came from." While doing the right thing by everyone became far more challenging as principal, he is clear that "I've got to look after the best interests of why we're there. We're there for the kids."

John's first senior role in a country school presented him with multiple ethical dilemmas. The staff and the community were divided in their views about the principal. On his first day he was approached by an influential member of the community and asked when he was taking over. John interpreted this as gender stereotyping of leadership in a conservative community. This affronted his own life experience of his mother as the sole breadwinner and a well regarded leader. His view was that the person in the position must be able to manage the job because they had been appointed to it and his "expectation for a long time was to support the leader." With hindsight, John's view has clarified. "It is not loyalty to the person in authority that drives me.' "When people tell me they will do what I say because I'm the boss, I say "No, tell me you'll do it because it's the right thing to do."

John continued to support the principal and was concerned about the poor behaviour of staff. While their concerns may have been justified, they were obliged to behave in a professional manner. Pressure inside and outside the school concerning the principal's behaviour grew and a flashpoint was reached. As the only other senior staff member in the school, his time to make a hard ethical choice had arrived. His thinking was, "whatever I do, we have to make sure we are doing the

best we can for everyone we possibly can," and he was appointed to the principal's role. He noted. "I knew it would be tough, but I couldn't walk away from that community. I put a lot of myself into that community, shed tears and lost a lot of sleep. This theme of responsibility, a term John used often, has been a through-line for John:

> I've got multiple responsibilities. I've got children for starters, staff, children's families, the Department of Education. I have to look after them. And these mean multiple factors that impact every day…. Doing the best by everybody, that is a constant tension. You have to sustain the tension. It's one of the best jobs in the world.

John's "moral duty" of being "here for the children" and for the "staff who need support" was a motivation for him in another school where working with an underperforming teacher further tested and developed his ethical framework as a principal. He has a particular interest in rigorous processes of producing teachers ready to teach. "I have a clear mandate in my head that if I wasn't prepared to have that person teach my children, then I wouldn't in good faith" recommend them as suitable for teaching. The evidence base that goes beyond personal judgement is very important to John; "inside me I have a protective process, am I doing the right thing by the person? Could they become capable?" People being supported by unions to become teachers based on procedural regulations rather than competence and the practice of principals giving teacher's "glowing reports" when they are underperforming in order to get them transferred are in conflict with elements of John's ethical framework. While "we are in the people business and we have to look after everybody in the job," a rigorous performance process that makes staff "accountable to the children, the clients" is the priority.

This focus on accountability to the students, judged by evidence based standards, has a clear purpose for John. "The better I can make my teachers, the better off our students are going to be." Accountability has particular meaning for John, and he described the importance of accountability to the students. He noted that being "accountable to the numbers the DoE wants from us" is not the important priority "as far as teaching goes." He accepts his responsibility to support and progress department priorities, but he sees the priority of all staff is to "get the best out of the individual child, whatever that is. It has to be improved from when they

walk in the door." John acknowledges that the community, the media, and the general public are aware of the measured outcomes but "does not buy that personally."

> I think that my job is to walk up to every teacher at the end of the day and say, 'did you improve your students lives today?' If they would all say, 'yes' then I would be happy with that. I wouldn't ask for a number. At this school, numbers have flat-lined for years, so we've got action around that but at the same time teachers look at individuals and cohorts. We don't work around numbers, we celebrate what we are doing and ask, 'are we doing the best for our children with what we have got.'

Working with staff for the benefit of student learning and also feeling responsibility for multiple groups has been a theme of John's principalship in two high schools. In both cases, John's focus on his fundamentals of fairness, education, and safety guided his decision making and actions.

In the case of First High School, John was assured on his first day by, a long standing teacher, that many teachers had been there for 20 years or so and knew what they were doing. He was lucky to be principal there. It quickly became evident to John that some of the teaching practice he observed did not demonstrate understanding of how children learn. While there were pockets of excellent teaching, data including an external review provided strong evidence offering a different view about the quality of teaching than the one held by a group of long serving teachers. The broader leadership dilemma was "getting everybody to understand that the school was not as outstanding as they thought it was. It was stagnating actually." The ethical dilemma for John was how to prioritize the ethical principles most important to him. He was encouraged by a member of his senior staff team to remember his "moral imperative" and that was "it's about the kids." John believed he would get the commitment to improvement of enough teachers given time. This belief was based in part on his belief in teachers are learners who, given the opportunity to research and support to change, will mostly chose to do what the evidence shows is best for students.

John noted that he had developed his understanding of the principalship by the time he began at First High. He characterised it as identifying that his "classroom

was now the staffroom." While he had good relationships with everybody as a teacher, he was now a principal "where you have to make some decisions that someone is not going to like." Such a decision increased the tension between himself and some members of staff. He made a formal complaint about a popular long term staff member concerning that person's ongoing verbal abuse of students. John believed that opposition to the changes recommended for the school increased because some staff gave allegiance to the staff member. It was difficult to understand how people could support a colleague who felt it was okay to call students "arseholes." His response to questions from some in the school about why he took this step was, "while I'm here, I'll do the right thing." John was keen to stay at First High and had faith in the capacity of individuals to do the right thing over time.

Second High consisted of a different mixture of staff perceptions and behaviour than First High. John's fundamental ethical principles have remained as has his faith and confidence staff commitment to learning, fairness and doing the right and best things by the students. "The line in the sand" remained and that "still comes back down to that side of the line which is the kids." John reflected on a period of time at the school when student behaviour and teacher responses to that behaviour deteriorated from what had been a level of considerable improvement. The ethical priority was still clear and considering the complex circumstances of daily school life influenced how John worked with staff. His view was that staff had reverted to unsatisfactory practice under the pressure of several demanding administrative requirements. As a result, there was a negative cycle of students feeling unhappy because they were not treated as they had come to expect and staff unhappy because the student behaviour was not appropriate. Appropriate teacher and student behaviour that had been in place for some time had both deteriorated and John identified the dilemma of needing to support teachers and students in a way that would reinstate the culture they had been achieving. While keeping the responsibilities of "paid adults" firmly in mind, it was important for John that the staff accepted responsibility "without feeling blame for what was happening." Growing concerns about student behaviour prompted an optional staff meeting attended by most staff members. John facilitated a learning process that invited staff to reflect on their own beliefs about behaviour management and the roles of suspension and exclusion in particular. His focus was on concepts of responsibility of

individuals and senior staff, fairness, safety and tolerance. He also acknowledged that seeing the problems as complex rather than complicated was very helpful in understanding the situation and deciding how to respond. This was a result of conversations between the first and second interview.

John used the principal's chair as a real and metaphoric way of describing his beliefs about the nature of responsibility and authority in the school. Part of the problem "comes down to everybody expects that the chair is responsible for the whole school." People expected change in the first few months and he felt the finger pointing at the chair when it did not happen. John's strong ethical view of principalship rejects reliance on the use of formal authority and he believes that his role as principal is one role while every other staff member also has an equally important role. "Yes, I have an important job it's a big chair, but I am no more important than the teachers in the school who are doing their jobs." His view is that the traditional idea of the principal means that teachers can leave problems of behaviour with the principal or senior staff and that approach is getting in the way of what has to be a sense of shared responsibility.

This shared responsibility is exercised in the decision-making processes about how to respond to student behaviour that risks the safety of staff and students or disrupts the learning of others. It is important to John that there is a shared understanding in the community and in the school about how decisions are made. He notes that "tolerance is high" when staff understand individual circumstances and increasingly at Second High, support plans are evidence based. He will not make decisions about alternative programs or suspension himself. The process

> Takes account of a whole heap of inputs, psychological, external support providers, people who know the family, staff, people who have conversations with the student. As a result of all that, we work out what levels of support we can actually manage. The ethic is that everyone is involved but sometimes the majority take precedence over the individual, but we never let the individual go. We have things in place to stay connected and we connect with the family.

A final reflection for John was around the “joy” he feels in much of his work. He described being “connected to the community. You learn to love that community in the sense that when they give you some of their trust it is a huge movement.”

Narrative 2: Cathy

Cathy believes that principals have an ethical responsibility to influence everyone in the organisations they lead to put the students at the centre of what they do. For her, "trust is the thing I'm carrying most" and the building and modelling of trust in relationships is crucial to what she believes to be ethical practice.

Cathy's experience includes a range of leadership roles in schools and in cross school student support roles and she has been a principal of a medium size primary school for several years. She reflects that others have noted her role as a "moral compass" and her particular focus on fairness as a theme of her work. "Carrying the trust" means

> modelling and being relied upon to perform and demonstrate a trustful way of behaving. As a leader you both model it out front, keep confidences, doing what you say you are going to do. It even means pushing back on something you said you were going to do when it may not be what people like, but you maintain the position. In the parent community, it means you walk the walk and talk the talk.

Her professional experience from the two perspectives of inside and outside schools has contributed to her forming the view that principals are "in an uncomfortable place" between the "corporate role" of representing the political agendas required by whole department priorities and the building of trusting relationships based on "working closely with families and the children. That means, you are dealing with ethical issues all the time." These two roles can generate a dilemma of trust for Cathy in which maintaining trust with one group, maybe the staff or the parents, can be difficult "when you have to or are told to, break trust with your staff because you have to push the more corporate role."

The uncomfortable tensions in the two roles are represented in two ways. Cathy's view is that representing and pursuing the department's outcomes and priorities can make the building of trust in the particular circumstances of a school more difficult. She also identified dilemmas in adopting particular leadership approaches encouraged by the department that may conflict with what she sees as the multi-factor responsibilities that are part of the principal role.

Cathy expressed the view that department requirements of principals can be "much more dependent on the political" and "that is a different moral purpose" to "our core business when we get to the coal face." She observed that some principals who push the department's messages right down to the classroom could create schools that

> are often unhappy and struggling with trust and relationships. The closer principals are prepared to be to the political dimension, the more chance there is that the collaborative relationship side of things might be lacking. If you have that sort of principalship then you see the relationships and trust in the school deteriorate and a result is that you have an organisation that is quite vulnerable to things going wrong, including student behaviour, staff dynamics, a whole load of things.

Deciding the most effective ways to "influence" students, staff and families to achieve the purposes of her role is a constant process of balancing tensions. Cathy identifies an ethical dilemma in this process. While she values her place within the department and supports the core shared purposes, she worries that the expectation of spending large amounts of time in classrooms means that "if you do that a large part of your job becomes waving in the wind waiting for something to happen." For her there is a tension between "what is actually possible in the role bearing in mind what is our core business from the department and what it is that actually helps make a school run effectively and successfully and has sustainable change over time."

The purpose of her role goes beyond improving student learning outcomes. This single priority focus on instructional leadership does not represent much of the role for Cathy. It does not describe her role which is

> to ensure and enable students to leave school with the best possible educational provision that they can in their grade 6 year. By the time they leave, their opportunities to succeed beyond primary schools are enhanced as much as it is possible and to leave no stone unturned to achieve that.

The importance of building trustful and respectful relationships is represented in part by transformational leadership and a dilemma for Cathy has been how the transformational and the instructional roles might both be done well, in order to improve both the measurable student outcomes and her broader purposes for the

school. While she noted that labels can be simplistic, her view is that rewarding principals for running particular programs and achieving specific improvements could be considered transactional and instructional leadership focuses most on student outcomes. Transformational leadership has a focus on the followers, the relationships, and shared vision. It better represents the aspects working closely with families that engages principals in ethical dilemmas.

How the principal can best carry the trust and develop the relationships that support the purposes of school are important drivers for Cathy in deciding the balance of her leadership practice. Her choices include pragmatics and ethical principles. Pragmatically, Cathy has decided to focus on encouraging "high leverage" teaching practice and "working out what gets in the way of that teacher" developing their practice. Her ethical principles include respecting the professional motivations and behaviours of teachers and basing action on agreed plans and procedures. In addition, "the absolute ethical bottom line" is "to do no harm" and that means Cathy is compelled to act decisively when the behaviour of either adults or children is unfair, not inclusive or bullying.

Cathy's has spent time at the current school developing a school plan through a collaborative process over a year that has identified key drivers that improve student performance. She believes that a culture of trust is in place because of a highly transparent process of collaborative learning and coming to agreements based on evidence. This development of a shared view about effective teaching practice has been accompanied by shared views about responsibility and both have a common foundation of what Cathy calls "inclusive behaviour." Her belief in inclusive behaviour is "how I think about ethical" and inclusive approach has been a driver for widespread agreement about teaching approaches and her views about authority and responsibility. She uses the term 'influence' rather than power or authority and values the "organic distribution of power" rather than the "gate keeping, control" and "do it my way" approach evident in the approach of some others in the school. Cathy explicitly shared with staff her view that "we are all responsible for the students in our school, we have a collective responsibility for every child regardless of whether they are in your class or not." She accepts she holds responsibility "in the eyes of the department" but works with staff on the basis that she does not have all the answers and is excited when new ideas emerge from others.

The year long period of developing trust and the collaborative learning and decision-making that resulted in the school plan, has established for Cathy a moral and ethical basis for working with teachers on their professional practice. Her work as a principal now includes instructional leadership and direct engagement with individual staff members. She observed that “I don’t feel morally compromised in saying the big picture is this, the individual support for you has been this, the collaborative work has been this” where some teachers are resisting the changes to high leverage practice. She notes that she would not “push back” “unless I feel confident that structure and support that have created trust with others” are legitimate. She has a strong belief that the trust between people is high as is the trust in the teaching approaches that have been agreed on. Cathy maintains a high level of respect for and confidence in individuals wanting to do their professional best, including those who, for valid reasons, are reluctant to change. However, she does not have an ethical dilemma in requiring them to change

> because I feel that what’s driving me is that we are responsible for the wellbeing of those children and we are responsible for their academic success and if we don’t enable them to have academic success by not teaching them with the highest leverage strategies then we are not ethically doing what we are responsible for.

Cathy is confident that almost every teacher “sees themselves as life-long learners” while a few have fixed mindsets and have no interest in knowing anything else. An ethical priority for her is to “show all employees that you are a professional and that your expectation is for them to be an exemplary professional.” Individuals are going to be all along that line but in every case the person must be given support to learn and change. Shared respect, loyalty, and trust must be maintained. Any action that does not acknowledge the individual and the history of the school and does not work to “bring the staff along with us” is “unethical because it doesn’t engage people professionally.”

Cathy believes that caution about change is due to fear of undermining one’s sense of self is a common reason for resistance

> so, what you have to understand is that, while your core business is students, you’re developing with public money the professional lives of adults, so you

> have to open up the possibility that you can be a learner and you can get it wrong. If you have culture supporting that then you can through goodwill and a trusting environment, you can build a community of learners and they are the teachers as well. You can't lead a school without seeing everyone as learners. You have to ask, if they were your class, what would you do? We've got realize that everyone is on a separate journey, some are wedded to what they are doing, and some are not.

Cathy's view is that schools are a lot more complex than classrooms. Teachers as learners is an important construct of her leadership and her views about ethical leadership practice, but teachers meeting the needs of all students is her ethical priority. She recalled as a classroom teacher a student in the school who spent the whole day on a computer; "I knew then it was not okay." Her "influence to change things is much greater now" although the need to be flexible and respond to the particular individuals and groups is made more difficult by the demands for particular sorts of plans and procedures and don't allow for complexity.

She thinks that some parents and staff are much more comfortable with traditional structures. "People want to count students. They grew up with a class register and they want to be able to tick off names. They had too much registering when they were young." Cathy reflected that governments and the department lend themselves to seeing problems as complicated rather than complex

> because they don't have a direct interaction with individuals daily, 24 hours, minute by minute. They can stay in their sanctum, whereas we are basically where things that are happening in the community are happening straight into the classroom.

She observed that while schools have not much changed since the 1960's, hospitals have changed substantially, particularly in how they build their professional knowledge. The best thing that could happen for schools is that the leadership that guides us should be guided only by what happens in schools. They should look at business models because they have to respond far more quickly to what people want and we've kept families at arm's length.

Narrative 3: Sally

Sally is principal of a mid-size primary school. This is her first experience as principal, and she is about 18 months into the role. She has played a number of roles out of school and several in schools and has experienced ethical dilemmas that arise in both those domains. Her experience is that they are very different kinds of dilemmas. The dilemmas she has come across in her leadership roles outside schools "have centred around bureaucratic tensions" where the focus is often on weighing up the "political" implications in planning and implementing organisation level programs such as Naplan.

Sally's view is that "in school it tends to be a bit more intimate" and this intimacy and closeness of her relationships with students, staff, and the school community is a significant influence on how she understands ethical decision making in her principal role where she "feels the dilemmas more personally."

She also identified and explored two broad areas of tension as her practical experience deepens. Sally observed that she feels "a great deal more tension between my inner world as a practitioner principal and the outer world of what it means to lead or manage and administer a school." She also considers the tensions in the differences between understanding herself as a teacher practitioner and as a principal practitioner.

> I am a teacher first and foremost in that I understand the way in which children operate in the world and the way in which children learn as individuals. As a principal, I see my role as finding the right structures, the resources for the school for the education of the children to occur under the quality, the pre-condition qualities of teaching so one is about management and the other is very much about the heart and soul of who I am as a teacher.

Sally has observed that her thinking about how she interprets her role developed over the interview conversations because she had an opportunity to reflect on her practical experience. In the first interview she said, "I'm a teacher who has become a principal. I've always been a teacher of kids who have struggled to stay in classrooms. As a principal I'm still a teacher of kids who struggle to stay in classrooms and I happen to be a principal." In the second conversation, Sally did not move from her commitment to students, but she did observe a much increased

awareness of the importance of working with her school based colleagues to "support them to get into areas of growth."

The levels of intimacy Sally noticed as influential in framing her ethical school leadership is expressed through a consistent and fundamental priority. For her "ethics is not negotiable, it's about care for other." Care for other in a school context is one of hard choices that are hard to reconcile when the 'others' includes children and staff whose interests are not always the same. Sally identified a unifying ethical touchstone to further describe care for other. In these reflections, she also acknowledged the range of people and interests she must consider in making choices, an increased awareness of the nature of her relationships as principal, and her particular responsibilities.

> A couple of things have happened; some thinking things, some events, and some thoughts just expressed because I'm getting more experience. It's coming back to one ethical principle for me. That ethical priority is how do I remain fully present for the kids, and because I'm a principal, for the community, even lately for the department. How do I contribute to that, how do I be present for that? As a principal, I'm in contact with every player in the department from the minister to the child, and the thing that is occurring is that my ethical touchstone is to be fully present at each of those layers. So with the child, I stop and say, 'I noticed yesterday when I saw you out in the playground…', or I stop and see a parent and I say, 'you know how you were saying last week about the surgery you were having…and this is what I've noticed about your son, does he know?' That kind of presence.
>
> And then there's my colleagues, trying really hard to be present for my principal colleagues and my teaching colleagues, but it's very hard because with my teacher colleagues I get impatient and frustrated. I'm noticing at different layers the challenge to my ethical touchstone can be more difficult at some layers than others. Where I find it most difficult being present at the moment is listening and being compassionate while at the same time holding high expectations with my teachers. That's been a real learning for me, I've not had to treat teachers before like a diverse class of students. How do I remain humble about that and not treat them like I am the one who knows?

> I'm not the one who knows, I want to support them to get into areas for growth.

Being present for Sally means a "physical, emotional, intellectual, consciousness about being here in this role." Emotionally present is not just being compassionate but asking what is the need of this other person that I'm with, and how am I in service to them, the self and other. "I'm in the service of others in a role that requires ethical presence" and she added that "You cannot be ethical unless you are present. It's a precondition for ethics." Sally resisted the description of 'caring' as a synonym for the ethic of being present. "I'm very careful about anything that puts me in the role of doing *for* other or *to* other. "Caring for others means they become an object then," so "if I label Julie as a domestic violence victim they are objectified in their role as an oppressed group of people." "They care for the person in ways where they can recognise ways to care for themselves" is a consistent ethical principle for Sally in her examples of responding to ethical dilemmas.

"Weighing up the wellbeing of a child and the wellbeing of the staff member and of the school" is a core dilemma in her school, located in a disadvantaged area where child trauma triggers behaviours that risk the wellbeing of students and staff. The context of the school and Sally's interest in improving the school's reputation are also factors she considers when responding to particular issues. She says

> I've seen a school hit the front page of the paper and I've seen the impact in the community. My school has a very poor reputation outside our community. It is a geographical amphitheatre with a poor reputation. So, to protect the community and the school, and to enable the school to be sustained over time and for the community to have the best chance for a future to sustain enrolments, if I'm to get capital works and funding to sustain the future of the school then I need to hold the school's reputation as positively as I possibly can within its own community. Part of the new vision is how we make that happen outside the amphitheatre of its own suburb.

It is a constant dilemma for Sally "about whose rights I am protecting. I think as a principal I am compelled to protect the rights of the staff member but as a practitioner I am compelled to protect the rights of the student first." She acknowledges the challenges for teachers in responding to physical assault and notes

that while “there is a very important place of consequence,” understanding the child’s past experiences and current family context are critical in supporting the child to learn. “Working with my staff to understand that first you are an adult against a child and secondly you are a professional versus a student and thirdly you are responsible because you are paid to be here” are priorities for Sally. At the same time, in situations where some children are violent or highly inappropriate, the ethical choice of whose rights to protect is particularly challenging for her, because “I have to protect the rights of teachers first.” This choice is difficult for several reasons. “It is every child’s right to learn and if we can’t fulfil that right, then the risk of intergenerational trauma and incarceration continues, and we must fulfil the obligations, such as in the strategic plan, for every child to have a fulfilling life.”

Sally has committed considerable resources to support individual children and the staff working with them. She provided an example in which the focus on supporting the child’s particular needs and learning and safety of staff has been undermined by a breakdown in support systems. That has tested her ability to provide the service and commitment to others that is important to her.

Sally noted that the particular child was representative and gave a detailed account of the decisions made collectively to support a child and the consequences of the loss of that support. She described how staff worked for a whole year with the child and the family and had quite a few agencies and people as part of the support plan. A large amount of money and aide was committed and “we had detailed information about the things that would let us know if he was going to have an incident.” By the end of the year he was attending for three days without an aide and spoke at the whole school assembly. At the beginning of this year there were four or five others with developmental trauma, and we distributed resources to them because we thought he would be okay. “Unbeknown to me and the school, the therapist intervention that he had with external agencies had stopped so the child was backed into a triple whammy – no therapy, no TA and in the after a few weeks into term we had three incidents with finally a teacher punched and things thrown at him. It was a big hit to the face.

The child was suspended. For Sally “the ethical dilemma was not that I don’t know what to do but that I no longer have the time or resources to do what I know works. Given that the teacher had actually been hit, unless I did something that

clearly backed the teacher, I knew I would have a major incident and possibility some publicity around it.' Sally has supported the teacher to work through the incident and worked to re-establish support of the child and his return to the school.

Sally has a strong sense of an ethic of "activism" driving her work. Social justice in the community is important and she supports social justice issues in practical ways. "I see my role as activism, ceasing worldwide oppression is impossible but you play your part on the stage. What I want my way in the world to be about is a social justice way of being in the world… and my leadership is an opportunity to play a part." She noted that the Department of Education is going through white ribbon accreditation. She wears the small white metal ribbon above her name badge. She recounted a conversation with a mother and son that included, tapping the white ribbon and telling them that she worked for an accredited white ribbon organisation "which means my decision making won't be based on me fearing men, especially men I haven't met," in response to comments that the boy's father would be angry. Sally continued, "so I was very clear about activism and domestic violence and women's oppression and what might help with that and I'll be explicit about it."

Sally reads widely and is involved in formal study but did not cite any specific ethical leadership literature or thinkers as influential in the ways she thinks about or works through ethical dilemmas. She noted that "wonderful things are written about ethics and justice" but what you end up doing is asking "what does it mean for me right now in the role I'm in." She did reflect that, as a student she was "an angry kid" who "intuitively triggered about social justice" and "my sense of social justice was already offended as a kid."

Narrative 4: Deb

Deb has been principal in her country town primary school for two years. She described two ethical dilemmas that frame her reflections about how she responds to ethical dilemmas as a principal. The first was the broad dilemma of being a principal for two years in a primary school "that has gone from a management scenario to a learning environment." The second was a specific example of working to build a relationship of trust with a mum who struggles with health and finance and feels she is a better parent than her own because her children are not in care. The child, Janice in grade 6, is often in conflict with others and needs to go off for a smoko every hour because it calms her down. Deb knows where the stash is but doesn't go there. Janice is an example of a number of children with challenging behaviours and challenging family circumstances.

Deb's view is that the longstanding management scenario she inherited has meant that some very challenging student behaviour dominated the school culture and there was not much discussion around learning when she began as principal. A first challenge was to "get an orderly learning environment in place," and to "establish common language and agreed processes across the school. Aligning behaviours with expectations was important because they needed, to be able to talk about learning which needs to be the core business." This core business of learning is a fundamental principle for Deb. It is the guiding principle for her engagement with students, families, and staff and for how she sees her practice as principal as she continues to move everyone from the "reactive to the proactive."

She struggles with many ethical dilemmas. A pivotal one is how to provide for individual students in the context of the whole school, that is recognised as a learning place for all and a workplace for staff. The behaviour of individuals that "obstructs learning for the majority" and makes things unsafe for students and staff is an ethical challenge because of the consequences of suspension on the individual. She acknowledges that "by suspending that child I'm taking that child back into what may also be unsafe," and that is "a real struggle because we are not meeting a need." There are times when she makes the choice to remove a child from school "because you can't have situations where staff are afraid or fearful" and "you can't have other students too scared to come to school."

Identifying how much she and the school can effectively do to meet individual need given the resources and alternatives available in the department and through other agencies is also a constant issue. Deb's view is that the school's determination to meet the needs of every child is restricted by "SRP's [school resource package] done to formula and pretty rigid systems." "The thing I struggle with is, as a system, we are not as fluid as we can and need to be." Being part of the jigsaw puzzle of other agencies such as police, housing, child safety, and Mission Australia, for example, is also frustrating for her. She wants every child in school but "all these things that keep happening in their lives are outside my jurisdiction," but she feels that "somehow they have been all pushed on to schools and back into the school." Deb is frustrated by the process where she and others "try and try and try" and participate with care team meetings and case conferences that "you can run every day." She is also frustrated because "we should be able to run a smooth enough process for students in relation to other agencies, but the reality is I don't think we're there yet." She says, "I can't change housing, can't change domestic violence" and at some point, she feels she has to identify what it is the school can do. "We can change the dialogue here (at school), we can decide what is happening here."

While there are those things outside the school she can't change, it is very important to build relationships with parents. Deb described her relationship with Janice's mum and her "work in the background" to build trust. It is important to Deb for Janice's mum to "to know that you will do everything you can to keep her child in school without just sending them to whatever service it is going to be." Understanding where the parent is at and what is happening in their lives is also important knowledge for the professional staff of the school. "The main motivation is to try to understand why it is this way. We can be dismissive or make decisions without understanding" the circumstances of the family.

Suspensions at the school have decreased and the school provides a range of support approaches for individual needs, but suspensions still occur. Deb's decisions to suspend a child are based on several considerations. "When you've tried every other option and you conclude that the situation isn't equity because others don't have choices and it has become unsafe" are important competing considerations. She also looks at the values of the Department that are "what we run our school around" and the degree to which "we are no longer meeting the needs of the group." A

decision to take the action also comes “when the overall direction of where you are going, belief in what you’re doing and what is valued at the school is truly challenged.”

Conversations with parents about suspension are the most difficult one’s Deb has because “I really don’t want to do this, but I feel like I don’t have any choice.” Although this part of her work worries her, and she thinks about it a lot, she firmly believes “in where we are heading, we as a group” and the priorities of the other factors she and others take into account. “It’s all about learning, this is what we are here to do.” That is where Deb sees the school heading and that is why she is focussing so heavily on improving instruction. For her, “wanting the best for every child” is “about building the capacity of every teacher.” That is why she concentrates her time and energy on working directly with teachers on their instructional practice and initiating and growing “dialogue” in the school. She notes that there has been a change in the dialogue over the last few terms in the school from “a culture of looking outside for excuses and reasons” to switching it around and concentrating on “what we can control is what we do in school hours.” “Our dialogue is very much now on what can I do to make a difference as opposed to all this stuff is a bit hard.” Deb observes that everyone has moved from “a blame game to this is what I can control. I have responsibility and we can make a difference.”

Dialogue as a particular way of engaging together to explore ideas and decide direction is an important methodology for Deb. Her deliberate approach has been to raise questions of both practice and theory together and encourage conversation that explores ideas and issues. “The greatest strength is in the conversation you have with staff” because “that builds the collective strength, the collective vision to get there.” The importance of dialogue and conversation is part of Deb’s overall view of the school as a combination of both adaptive and technical problems and approaches. While there are technical processes that can be improved and got right, her view is that it is the adaptive challenges that offer opportunities to learn and achieve growth. “It is the adaptive spaces where we have growth, where people can learn and make mistakes.” Deb noted that schools run a very fine line of creating a different space “of do it this way” where there is one right way. She reflected that there is no one right way and even though the staff had developed a clear pedagogical framework of four pillars that underpins practice, “how do we know they are the right four?” It is

important for the space to be adaptive so that people can learn and feel their way and constant dialogue is important for learning a better way. The other way, instruction down, doesn't do that.

For Deb, it is important to "build the invisible theory and bond people together about what you are trying to do" and that everyone contributes to that. "It's not black and white, you're living in a space that's a shared space with individual people in a school within a community. Building those relationships is an adaptive thing." This process has resulted in a significant shift in dialogue that concentrates on building agreement about "what is going to give us the greatest leverage is our practice" and paying the most attention to knowing what that practice is. Deb thinks of adaptive and culture together. It's the adaptive nature of building relationships and the process of dialogue that is one of understanding "how we will know it when we see it, how we will measure it and how we will keep improving the quality." The school now has agreement around language and shared agreement around good practice.

The emphasis on instructional improvement is the driver of Deb's vision of the fundamental ethic of the school. While she has a bean bag in her office as a safe place for children to sleep, Deb sees that as a means to end. She agrees that "we've got to look after them, got to love them" but that is not enough. Even if they have experienced trauma, they all have to have access to the best possible education. Deb is adamant that these children must have teachers that

> have to be almost expert in the instructional delivery to make up for lost time so it's very important that you can't have low level, low intensity stuff because you feel sorry for them. I feel sorry, but my driver is so much more.

While she agrees that the school has to be safe for children, "at the end of the day we have a responsibility as well, and that fundamental is instructional work and learning." Colouring in tractors may keep Angus calm but it's not education.

In reply to the question, "what is your driving, fundamental ethic or purpose?" Deb included the following response:

> The thing that fundamentally drives what I do is probably excellence around public education. We have to get it right. We've got to provide the best possible public education environment because fundamentally our children

only get one choice. This school is their school and where that school is should not make a difference. What should make a difference is that I have someone with great instructional practice who is ready to go for the day and it doesn't matter what school it is.

I think what drives me is choice, and I want them to have choices in their life. We want them to have opportunities and dreams and choices. I want the kids at this school to say, 'I have this choice,' and to know what they are. I want everyone to come with dreams. For some, having dreams is something they don't have. We have to create that. I asked Janice what her dreams were one day, and she just looked at me. She has things going for her and she's a brilliant athlete, but her sense of survival is much greater than what she is going to be doing in ten years' time. We have to create a sense of dreams.

I talked to the leadership team this year about the drivers for me focus so heavily on improving instruction. It's the fact that a teacher could have an entire community go through his or her classroom. When I think I've a teacher I have to work very closely with, I remember she could have 1,000-1,500 go through her class. Each individual teacher has the capacity to work with a whole community. That's how I see it. It's about building community. If you can build a love, if you've got a teacher who engages and inspires then I would hope that there would be a knock-on effect to the next generation.

Narrative 5: Ben

Ben has recently been appointed as principal to a large school after a decade of principalship in another large school. Ethical dilemmas are an everyday constant in his work. He has become increasingly conscious of what it means to be a principal to the point of believing that "every moment is a leadership moment." "In the job you have conversations about how life should be." Ben articulates the relationships between his personal values and priorities with those that underpin his practice as a principal and the ways in which his framework for analysing and understanding situations guide his decision making process. He is also clear about the fundamental principles driving decisions and the ongoing ethical tensions he "wrestles with."

Ben's practice as a principal is an expression of his "framework for what I think a good life is." He is clear that "ethics has to be personalised, it has to be around who you are, you can't turn it on or off can you? It's to do with who you are." He has three "ethical anchors" that are not the same as those driving his professional ethics but do underpin them. First, there is love for humanity, for life and love as a celebration for living. Second, there is service, in which life has to be of service. The third is experiences, a view of life's events as experiences to be accepted for the learning they offer.

Ben includes several core concepts in his professional ethical framework that inform choices and questions he uses as tools for understanding the circumstances and deciding action. The core concepts are safety, learning, and respect and these are explicit and transparent across the school. The message he gives to the students is that, "as long as you're doing those three; you can pretty much do anything." He keeps in mind a range of questions to guide decision-making.

> How do I work ethically and effectively though this to enable a solution that meets first the needs of all the players? What is the ethical, what the right framework to deal with this? You think in the situation, who is the victim, who is most at risk, who are the most effected what are the highest priorities?

The essence of an ethical dilemma for Ben is doing what is right and deciding "how to define what is right and balancing the rights of all the players" – student and student, student and teacher, state and school, and between families. Ben was invited to reflect on rights and responsibilities in a school context.

> In school setting, every child deserves an education. With that goes a set of expectations on the system for schools to provide that. That's fundamental and in the law, it's what makes it a better society – universal access to an education. In a school setting the people employed have rights, the other kids have rights, families have rights. Where that can clash is what I call the basic two – safe at school and learning. Everything is fine as long as someone doesn't impinge on the rights of other people, where a student starts impinging on the rights of others ability to learn. That can happen the other way as well where the teacher does not create the space for learning, they have that responsibility. You have rights and you also have responsibilities – to students and staff. In schools with high expectations, people put their responsibilities before their rights and that's when you're really humming along.

Ben explored how the ethical framework guides his actions and his thinking at two levels. At the whole school level, cultural shift towards high expectations is a priority of his leadership and his view is that "a cultural shift is an ethical thing." He has kept this in mind when modelling the framework of ethical practice in his leadership work in response to the specific events that occur regularly.

The specific example Ben offered was an opportunity to describe how he applies his framework and guiding principles. He was careful to note two things he considers in testing that he is acting ethically. He "takes the broad view" and makes sure "I have taken the time and space to look broadly at the picture." Looking only at an incident and the behaviour of individuals just in that time without taking account of the broader context of each child's circumstances, particularly their families would, for Ben, "not be ethical." The other element he reminds himself of is one he calls a "selfish" one.

> I have to walk away feeling good about it. How I dealt with it would have to correspond with, mirror, values I espouse and represent the leader I want to be. I have to be able to say that I dealt with X ethically. I have some feel good indicators. I did all I could. I have thought from the point of view of what the school and I can do without blaming, I've looked for ways to seek improvement, and I've balanced the rights of everyone.

The incident Ben used involved three students assaulting another. They were in a room together unsupervised for a time and the events were recorded on CCTV. The victim made some comments to the others and one responded by attacking him. To varying degrees, the other two then participated. Ben was clear that what the boys did was absolutely wrong and there had to be a strong response. He noted also that "nothing is simple ethically" and he knew all about the four boys. "There's a back story, and a back story and a back story." Each of the boys has a background mixture of trauma, cognitive impairment, or family challenges. The mother of the victim was particularly upset and adamant that severe consequences were necessary, and the school was "vulnerable" because the teacher should not have left the children alone.

Ben knew the family circumstances of all the students and the ethical framework he described required him to apply that consistently while remembering that all the students are of equal value, but the victim had to be the first priority. "I care about the kids and I want to make a difference. Equity is important, but equity doesn't mean the same for everybody." Ben wanted to resolve it so that the boy who was assaulted "feels safe, supported, and believed and confident that it would not happen again." While the other boys had to be suspended, Ben noted that "we have to understand the families of all of the students." His assurance to them was to support them to be safe and focus on learning, and also to work through their actions. That included participation in a restorative justice process because it provides an opportunity for the perpetrators to understand the effects of what they did on the victim and then see that there is a way to set it right. They can do things." Ben wants to "create a world where all of those families, kids and families feel they have a right to come to school and feel safe, but they also know how to grow and learn."

Suspension of students is an ethical dilemma for Ben but on balance he feels that "there has to be an outcome but more powerfully part of it is the message it sends about the greater good- to the victim, the teachers, and people who know what happened. It's a public statement that this is not on." Ben acknowledges that it is not necessarily the best for the small number who are suspended and that is an ethical dilemma itself for him.

The ways in which suspension and exclusion are understood and used in the school are examples of the cultural shift that is now evident in the school. They are part of Ben's deliberate approach to "continually creating a consciousness of the

need to change, the purposes we have to have, what is the purpose of our school." That cultural shift towards increased higher expectations has meant changes in the use of suspension and exclusion. While both can be seen as "an easy way out that means the school is a safer place and a whole lot of people might benefit" but, Ben concludes, "that's just not right."

Making such decisions in the school now includes discussions with staff about "what the school can tolerate" in deciding action. The concept of tolerance is one of making judgements about the resources available and the strength of the school's systems ability to support challenging behaviour. Some students have been suspended or excluded recently because of a "massive ongoing impact on the culture of our school, the health of other kids, staff and families and the reputation of the school." Ben made that judgment because "we are strong enough in enough areas to tolerate" that impact. He notes that there is an increased capacity to keep students "in the system as long as we can make other people confident that the system could do that." Again, it's an example "of the most challenging fundamental ethical dilemma – balancing the fundamental rights of the individual and the rights of the school."

Learning drives the school's increasing focus on high expectation. In Ben's view "the biggest thing about school is that we're setting kids up for life" and education in itself is "a strong moral purpose" that makes schools "highly ethical enterprises." That moral purpose goes beyond the individual to include broader questions; "where's the growth, where's the improvement, where's the better world?"

The increased focus on learning includes staff, and how to do that is part of the ethical dimension of leading for cultural shift. Ben acknowledges that some staff are struggling with the change process and while they may nod and agree in conversations, they may not be committed to high expectation culture. Understanding those reasons while at the same time continuing with necessary changes is necessary. Ben includes modelling behaviour, sharing perceptions of the school, and discussing performance data in his approach and while he continues to "work with staff to establish an agreement about how we are as a school."

Ben's understanding of the school as two types of systems assists him with understanding how staff members see and feel about decision-making. Parts of the

school can be seen as a bike and other parts are a frog. The bike parts are “the system things you can get right and perfect.” The four boys in his story should not have been left unsupervised and that incident “was completely predictable after the event.” There were technical things they could and should have been done. A bike can be taken apart, analysed, fixed and put back together. The frog can’t be understood, not fixed that way. You can’t pull it apart, understand how it works and then put it back together. Frogs are not technical problems and a lot of what we do in schools are frogs. The school culture is a frog and “everything you do and don’t do makes the culture.”

Narrative 6: Luke

Luke has been a principal in two primary schools, one in a country town and the other in city suburb. In his reflections on responding to ethical dilemmas he drew on two incidents that attracted considerable public interest at both a school community level and through widespread media coverage. While both of the examples required considerable engagement with laws and regulations and a range of government agencies, the reason why Luke believed them to be "ethics based was because of the people involved. If you took them as, this has happened therefore there is this consequence, then it's a different type of issue than an understanding of the people who were impacted upon." For Luke, taking account of the rules and procedures has to be done properly but the breaking of laws or regulations is not the dilemma. The ethical dilemmas arise in "supporting all those who need help and to be very clear with others about how our school supports all."

One case involved a teacher who did not follow clear procedure and whose actions put the health of a number of children at risk. Luke became aware that the matter had come to public attention when he saw the daily newspaper headline. He recalled that "you don't know what to do, but what you do know is that there are people involved here, there are people who are scared, there are people who are worried, people whose careers are in doubt, including mine." The matter required extensive leadership action and the ethical priority was to "look after and support" the children directly affected, their families, the teacher and the community. "For the good of the community" it was important to move on "as soon as possible with the educative process." The teacher made a serious mistake and the consequences of that had to be taken into account through formal process. It was an important priority for Luke to acknowledge that the teacher was a good person and an active respected person in the community. He put the view to the community that if was possible for the person to work back in the school then "that's the way we should go."

Luke is clear about his core values. "We need to look after and support every child and we need to look after and support every teacher and we need to look after and support every parent. Every student, every parent, every day. I need staff to know that every minute they are modelling what we want the kids to be." "Every minute of every day you have to model what you believe in. It took me a while to learn that there was no down time."

When asked to reflect specifically on the ethical framework guiding the work of principalship he said, “I always knew I put people first and had a clear view on students and their welfare, but it was only during the principalship that you grasp the breadth of what this means in terms of parents and my role of support.” He noted the importance of teacher welfare grew out of his time at his current school “where we had a teacher’s partner suicide, one who had a schizophrenic son, another a son who committed suicide, and others with aging parents needing care.

This close and constant attention to relationships with students, staff and families has several elements touched on throughout this case study. “Care and respect” for everyone because “they are a true person” is foundational. This care and respect is acted on both for its own sake and through “the lens of the educator” and the purposes are the quality of the school as a community, the benefit of the whole community and the potential of the child as a 25 year old.

This care of everyone as members of a community is represented in how Luke describes the school to new families. He tells them that if they come in with children he wants them to be part of the school.

> One of the things I say clearly is you need to understand that your child is going to have two more parents. One is going to be me, and one is their class teacher but we’re going to bring this child up together and we’re going to make the best 25 year old we possibly can. It’s going to take time, we’re going to disagree, but we’ve got to work together.

The fundamental principle of care for and of children and their families within the school as a community guided Luke through several ethical dilemmas he described. One involved a series of profound events that included complaints of abuse by children towards a person involved in the school, a high level of public interest and a prolonged period of investigation without resolution where the children and some family members from both sides remained in the school. Luke made the point that “it wasn’t clear to any of us about how to act in this case” but, he said, “it’s not my job to judge, it’s my job to allow students the best opportunities to succeed.” That success depended on Luke applying one of his foundational principles in that “for them to have the best opportunities to succeed then I had to ensure that their parents can play a part in the school.” “For me to say that and then say that you can’t

be involved in the school is something that I could see as not okay" because Luke believed so strongly "that parents need to be involved in their children's education." That meant that for 12 months, Luke and the staff worked through ongoing potential and real conflict, particularly between the adults, to make sure they all had the same rights to be part of parent help and be in the school.

The responsibility and importance of the school as an education community is represented in a different way in the case of Perry, a boy with challenging behaviours, who came to the school and did not fit the normal profile of other children in the school. His violent behaviour to get his way led to some parents wanting Perry removed in order to maintain safety for their children. Luke responded to this in several ways. He reminded parents that "our job is to educate, work with, every child in our area." He also put the view that the whole school community had a responsibility to Perry to help him "become the 25 year old we want him to be – it's us, it's not me, it's us as a group." He argued to the parents and the other children that everyone had a role to play and while misgivings remained, Perry's behaviour continued to improve and now he's "having a phenomenal year."

Luke is explicit about his work with parents to build the collective ethos of including everyone from the start, no matter what. This has meant working with parents "way smarter than me, but passionate and wrong" and some who behave badly under emotional pressure and require home visits and ongoing engagement for them "to do the right thing." Luke expressed frustration that some parents don't keep the big picture for the kids in mind all the time and expect them to behave always in an appropriate manner. He was conscious of the risks of some behaving badly but the priority of keeping everyone engaged has meant a constant process of reminders, support, and negotiation rather than exclusion.

The practical application of ethical drivers is a theme in Luke's reflections. Modelling behaviour that represents what the school values is very important. "As a principal, if you believe in something you have actually got to do it" and you "have to be transparent and honest about that." He said,

> with your ethics, you have to be really clear in what you believe in, so therefore you follow that process all the time and there is an accountability

> for you. Hopefully you have someone on staff who will come to you and say, 'Luke, that doesn't fit with everything else you have done,' and this is fine.

He offered several examples. In one he decided the best way to manage young students who constantly ran away was to build a fence around part of the playground. They got a quote for the work and a member of staff said, "Luke, you always say we can't divide the playground, so we can't do this. Because it is. Every kid can play with every kid in our school, so we have to find another way." So, they need to spend more and fence the whole school because what was implied was that school was divided.

The overall ethic of principalship for Luke is captured when he said,

> as a principal you have got to be thinking about the whole kid and the wrap around things that go with them – that is family and us. You need to think about staff and their family, so I think the ethic is to have a broader range, kids, families and teachers that you value and are really caring and concerned about. It is a whole life of those three groups.

Luke was particularly strong in his views about the importance of caring for and respecting teachers and staff. His view was that some principals don't truly care about some of their teachers and their families. He noted that he "knew enough about them to think deeply about what is impacting upon them today." This knowledge about "where they are at (in their lives) and why they are here has a professional purpose." He notes,

> they are good teachers but when are we going to introduce it and when am I going to have a clear view of the issues involving every teacher to be able to bring that in when they are ready. In kids, we talk about the zone of proximal learning. When are we going to do that with teachers? We have got to have an awareness of the whole person to be able to make that good decision as best we can.

These good decisions are the judgements about improving practice. For Luke, requiring changes without knowing what each teacher is doing and why is not ethical. Differentiating is not just something necessary for student learning. It is ethical to be in the classroom and showing "respect for what they can already do."

Teachers are given credit for what they do, and often “they already have a beautiful vehicle that we can just tweak to become more of a whole school way forward.”

This respect for individual teachers and their practice is part of Luke’s approach to decision-making and the use of authority. He avoids the term ‘instructional leader’ because it does not fit his approach of helping teachers with their work and suggesting ways forward. When a principal decision is required, he identifies the decision that way and is “transparent about when you are taking people’s opinions or whether you are not.” When it is his call, he is direct about and always provides a structure and an end point to frame the decision-making.

The use of formal authority is “pretty much irrelevant” to Luke and he “never, even as a teacher, looked at it (schools) as a power based industry.” He avoids arguments and debates that push people to defend their egos. He encourages the exploration of ideas and putting lots of options on the table. Sometimes he makes the choice and often the discussion extends beyond the meeting as he encourages people to talk with him and each other over a period of time.

This way of working with people has a clear ethical dimension for Luke around respect for teachers as practitioners, the value of group reflection and the appropriate use of the authority that comes with principalship. Luke notes, “you sit there and then you come back and go with the people. You’ve got to go with the people and you can’t just stand there and tell them.”

Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter presents six unique perspectives on the same issue of responding to ethical dilemmas. Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of the interview data on which these narratives are based. A summary appropriate to the purpose of these narratives is to note the willingness of every principal to continually respond to the often profound challenges faced by the people who are the school. A deep sense of the unique purposes of their work tempered their relationships. Each narrative and the collection offer opportunities for deeper understanding about practice within the school environment; a social organisation that may be unique.

Chapter 5. Findings and Discussion

Chapter Structure Overview

This chapter has three parts. Part A concentrates mainly on RQ 1, Part B on RQ 2, and Part C is a discussion of themes and a summary of observations across the two research questions. The chapter begins with a review of findings about schools as systems and follows with data and findings about the principals' understanding of schools as systems in Part A. The findings and discussion about the principals' understanding of ethical dilemmas and ethical school leadership are in Part B, and Part C is a discussion based on the overall research question. This discussion identifies six big ideas arising from the combined findings of the criteriological inquiry and the data from the six narratives. The chapter concludes with a diagrammatic representation of principals' ethical leadership practice derived from all the research data.

Parts A and B both have a Section 1 on findings and a Section 2 on discussion. This organisation identifies findings specific to the research questions and sub-questions, while also accommodating the shared threads of findings and observations woven and interdependent throughout the study.

Part A

Part A Section 1 summarizes the RQ1 findings of the criteriological inquiry in the literature review that addresses RQ1:

What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?

Findings relating to principals' understanding of schools as systems are also presented. These address the RQ2 sub-question c:
How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?

Part A Section 2 a discussion of the findings about principals' understanding of schools as systems in relation to the literature and the criteriological inquiry.

Part B

Part B Section 1 presents the findings for RQ2:

How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?

a. ***How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
b. ***How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***

Part B Section 2 is a discussion about principals' responses to ethical dilemmas and their understanding of ethical leadership.

Part C

Part C is a summary and discussion of the themes across the criteriological inquiry and the literature review of Chapter 2, the narratives of Chapter 3, and the narrative inquiry into the interview data.

Chapter content introduction and summary

This section includes a summary of the chapter structure, an overall introduction to the chapter, a summary of the combined research questions findings and a summary of the combined Part A and Part B discussion. The findings and relevant data are organised through specific reference to the research questions. While the findings support consistent themes, the focus on data for specific questions can make these threads difficult to follow and the findings summary provides an introductory overview.

There are two research questions arising from the overall question of***, How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?***

Research Question 1. ***What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?***

Part A presents the findings and discussion of implications for RQ1and they are organised in two sections. Part A Section 1 revisits the criteriological inquiry conducted in the Chapter 2 literature review. There is a review of the theoretical position and a summary of the findings of schools as complex adaptive social systems. It also presents data from the principals' interviews to make findings about

principals' perceptions of the nature of schools as systems. These findings address the sub question of RQ2 (c):

***How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems*?**

The two questions are combined in this way to facilitate exploration of the connections between the theoretical findings of the criteriological inquiry and literature review, and principals' practice and perceptions that are particularly relevant to systems thinking.

Research Question 2. ***How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?***

a. How do principals understand ethical school leadership?
b. How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?

The interview data are used to develop findings that address RQ2. The theoretical findings from RQ1 frame the RQ2 focus on ethical decision-making and the interview data on principals' system thinking and practice continue as important elements in the RQ2 findings and discussion.

The very nature of schools as complex adaptive systems, the focus of what it means to be ethical, and the research questions that arise, mean that discrete parts are difficult to separate from their connections to the other parts of the system (Poli, 2013). There are some implications of these multiple and simultaneous interactions for this chapter. The quotations used as examples and evidence in this chapter are separated from the complex context of the principals' reflections represented in their interview responses. The rich meaning is put aside, and the priority is identifying specific evidence to illustrate the findings. The richness is captured in the narratives. A further implication is that the multiple threads are continuously present but not specifically identified.

Summary of findings for research questions.

The data and findings for both research questions and the sub-questions are considered separately for each question in this chapter. The threads of the findings

weave the emerging picture as the data and findings accumulate through the chapter. This summary identifies the findings that emerge through the chapter.

RQ1: What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems? The criteriological inquiry found that school are complex adaptive social systems with characteristics that influence the nature of what it means to practice ethical leadership. The constant need to make ethical choices is a normal characteristic of complex social systems, including schools. The literature review of school leadership literature found that it largely overlooked and misunderstood the system nature of schools. This mismatch and lack of attention have consequences that are identified and discussed throughout this research.

RQ2: How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisation characteristics of their school?

a. How do principals understand ethical school leadership?
b. How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?
c. How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?

Question RQ2 (c): How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?

This sub-question is linked directly with RQ1 in this chapter because it examines principals' perceptions of systems and provides data that is directly relevant to the criteriological inquiry findings of schools as systems. The findings from the interview data are that principals' leadership practice is consistent with the nature of complex systems. Four themes emerge from the interview data and they are:

- Human behaviour is unpredictable and surprising.
- There is a sense of little control over diverse agents that influence their practice.
- Problems have multiple causes and consequences.
- These problems are dilemmas because they represent competing ethical choices.

The discussion of these findings is organised around two observations. The first is that there is close alignment between principals' practice as a representation of their understanding of schools as complex systems. The second is that learning is an ethic in itself and a key characteristic of their system thinking.

RQ2 (a): How do principals understand ethical school leadership?

The findings are organised around three themes.

1. The ethical nature of leadership.
   Every principal saw their leadership as fundamentally ethical for several reasons. They are explored under two shared threads:

   - Engagement with individuals, and acknowledgement of individual dignity, rights, and responsibilities.
   - Modelling ethical principles though their own practice, particularly decision making.

2. Authority and power as expressions of ethical leadership.
   They identified the importance of informal leadership, the need to identify ethical choices in driving decisions, and the importance of shared accountability and responsibility.

3. Learning and collaboration as ethical practice.
   Data is presented providing further evidence of learning as an ethical purpose and practice in itself and as an effective means of achieving outcomes.

RQ (b): How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?

All participants saw their leadership as unavoidably driven by ethical principles arising from the essential nature of schools. Their view of the nature of ethical dilemmas included a shared and interconnected set of principles, priorities and tensions summarized as:

- Best interests of students, staff, and the school community and the tensions between them.
- Individual student interests and majority student interests.
- Safety and individual rights.
- Multiple, competing rights.

- Dilemmas due to family and community context.
- Competing priorities and tensions.

There was little distinction or separation between their own ethical priorities and the ethical purposes of schools. Individual student learning was the main driver and learning as a means to ethical ends and as an end in itself were shared priorities. Safety and equity were priorities woven throughout all the interview data and the shared theme was balancing competing rights in unique contexts and the tensions between rights and responsibilities. Student achievement and learning were the foundational ethical purposes.

Summary of all discussions

The Part B discussion of RQ1 about the nature of schools as systems and RQ2 (c) about how principals understand their schools as systems is organised around two key points. The first is that the principals' leadership practice is closely aligned with their understanding of schools as complex systems and a practical representation of leadership consistent with the nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems. The second is that, for the principals, learning is an ethic in itself and is a strong representation of their system thinking in action.

The Part B discussion of RQ2 about principals' ethical decision-making is organised under four headings representing the shared themes that emerged. They are:

1. How principals describe schools as systems.
2. The nature of ethical dilemmas.
3. Ethical purposes of schools and their own ethical priorities.
4. How principals describe the nature of ethical leadership.

Part C discusses the themes emerging across all of the research and is best considered as whole given that it is a synthesis that includes a conceptual model representing the research findings. The next section considers the detailed data and findings for the research questions. That includes a recap of the findings for RQ1, detailed in the criteriological inquiry of Chapter 2, and presents the data, findings and discussion for RQ2Data, Findings and Discussions for the Research Questions

Part A RQ1: Introduction

RQ1: What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?

This section is a summary of the criteriological inquiry in Part A of the literature review, Chapter 2. Part A explores the nature of schools as human systems and how education leadership literature represents schools as systems either explicitly or implicitly. The criteriological inquiry is a research output for Research Question 1 about the nature of schools as systems.

The criteriological inquiry into the nature of schools as systems evolved as an important question in the early stages of the literature review into how principals respond to ethical dilemmas. This researcher's own experience as a school principal stimulated this focus. Responding to ethical dilemmas and the emotions and multiple consequences associated with them was a particularly challenging part of the role.

Cranston's (2009) research into how principals responded to dilemmas in their schools raised the possibilities of the research question in the first place. His work with his colleagues identified three relevant outcomes. The first was that an area of personal interest to this researcher was worthy of productive research. Secondly, their work on this question was uncommon and there was little attention paid to the real life actions of school leaders in response to ethical dilemmas. The third realisation was that ethical dilemmas were recognised as a defining element of complex human systems by researchers into the nature of human organisations. That link between the wicked problems (Rittel & Weber, 1973) of organisations and the nature of schools as complex systems stimulated this research.

Part A RQ1 Section 1: Findings

RQ1: What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?

Summary

The key finding of the organisational characteristics of schools is that schools are open complex adaptive social systems with some characteristics of open complicated systems. The inquiry identifies that school leadership literature is based on characteristics of schools as complicated systems rather than complex systems. This choice is based on unexamined assumptions and a lack of awareness about the

important consequences of unexplored mental models about the nature of schools as systems. Consideration of schools as systems is uncommon in education literature and those who do examine schools as systems conclude that they are complex.

Four questions frame this summary of the criteriological inquiry and literature review.

1. What is systems thinking?
2. What are the specific characteristics of open complicated systems and open complex systems?
3. What is the case for schools as open complex systems and particularly complex adaptive open systems?
4. What is the case for arguing that education literature misunderstands or misinterprets the nature of schools as systems?

What is systems thinking?

Systems thinking is the way in which one understands how different parts of a system or organisation interact and influence each. A system is "any perceived structure whose elements hang together because they continually affect each other over time" (Senge et al., 2012, p. 124). Boulding (1956), Forrester (1998), Pispapia (2009), and Sterman (1994), writing about system thinking but not schools specifically, make several relevant points. Sterman notes that this systems thinking is not common and that it more common to see parts of an organisation in isolation from each other. These writers note that the systems thinking that does take place is most often and enduring mechanical clockwork model (Boulding, 1956), and Hazy et al., (2007) note that systems theory has developed over the last hundred years. System thinking as an uncommon practice and a persistent view of human systems as clockwork mechanics set the scene for explaining contemporary systems thinking as demonstrated in school leadership literature.

What are the specific characteristics of open complicated systems and open complex systems?

The differences between mental models of human systems are grouped as either complicated, complex, or a mixture of both. While both are open in the sense that their boundaries as human organisations cannot be clearly differentiated from other

human organisations, the differences between complicated and complex and profound. Table 1 is a summary of the differences explored in the criteriological inquiry.

Theoretical examinations of these models have become more common in recent decades The work of Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009), Marion et al., (2016), and Olson and Eoyang (2001) are among those included in the literature review and who have contributed to the development complexity theory and complexity leadership theory. Heifetz (1999, 2001, 2009) has contributed to the concept of adaptive leadership as a practice appropriate to complex systems as opposed to the technical work informed by expert knowledge of solutions to known problems.

What is the case for schools as open complex systems and particularly complex adaptive open social systems?

The case for schools as largely complex systems is derived largely from theory and research not explicitly based on schools and some of them are identified above. A number of education researchers do present the case for schools as complex systems. Morrison (2001, 2010, 2012) applies complexity theory specifically to schools by taking complexity characteristics, (emergence and self-organisation for example), and demonstrating their relevance to schools. Duignan (2012) notes the need to "recognize that schools are living, complex, dynamic, mostly non-linear organisations" (p. 21) and others including Gough (2012) and Beabout (2012), Boal and Schultz (2007), and Keshavarz et al., (2010), all argue for the importance of understanding schools as complex systems.

The case for schools as a public sector organisation that is a complex system is argued in a paper, *Tackling wicked problems: A public policy perspective* (Commission, 2012). The paper cites the concept of wicked problems introduced by Rittel and Webber whereby social issues addressed by governments "defy traditional ways of working and solving problems in the Australian Public Service" (p. 10). Rittel and Webber (1973) examine the dilemmas emerging in planning theory that cannot account for problems resistant to formal authority, expert knowledge and the application of known solutions, such as public health and poverty. Their observation that these wicked problems require responses based on choices about what is ethically most important is highly relevant to this study. The literature view also

explores their argument that wicked problems have emerged because many problems previously viewed as easy because they could be judged by efficiency are now being "challenged by a renewed preoccupation with the consequences of equity" (p. 156). The generic characteristics of open complicated and open complex systems are summarised in Table 1 and used as analytical tools in the exploration of how principals understand their schools as systems.

The criteriological inquiry concludes that schools are a particular type of open complex system and the term complex open adaptive systems is proposed. The argument is that the concept of adaption captures the importance of learning and the continual need to adapt to the changing circumstances in schools as organisations located within communities that respond to changes in public policy. It argues that schools as systems need also to be described as 'social' due to distinctive characteristics based on highly interactive, emotional, and personal relationships built up over extended time by the nature of the relationships between school staff and children's families within a distinct community. The criteriological inquiry concludes that schools then are largely complex adaptive systems with elements of technical, complicated systems. These technical elements are those requiring expert knowledge, such as teaching reading. How and where to act on this expertise informs decision making that is based on the complexity of making ethical choices about how to use scarce resources to meet multiple student needs.

The inquiry also identifies the characteristics of open complicated systems and concludes that education literature and system level policies are based on these complicated characteristics. The conclusion is that schools therefore are open complex social systems. There is, therefore, a misalignment between the real nature of schools as complex systems and the assumed and inaccurate representation of schools as complicated systems.

The inquiry concludes that a consequence of schools as complex social systems is that ethical choices for principals are normal, continuous and usually constitute a dilemma. This establishes a strong direct relationship between schools as complex social systems and the presence of ethical decision making. These findings create a framework for exploring the compatibility between the range of assumptions and conclusions about schools as systems and how principals practice their

leadership of schools and this is the focus of the findings for RQ2, the main purpose of this chapter.

What is the case for arguing that education literature misunderstands or misinterprets the nature of schools as systems?

The literature review examines school leadership and ethical leadership literature across Part A and Part B. There is little specific reference to the characteristics in either genre. Those education researchers who do write about systems thinking all note this absence and explore the implications of consequent misunderstandings and assumptions. Duignan (2012), cited in the previous question section, notes that many attempts to change schools "tend to use traditional, hierarchical, bureaucratic and linear structures and processes" (p. 23). Gough (2012) observes that "concepts associated with simple systems persist in contemporary discourse of educations inquiry" (p. 41) and he describes the disconnect between the complexity represented in the wicked problems that many public service organisations face and the resilience of seeing them as complicated problems. Choosing to see them as complicated makes them amenable to the traditional approach Duignan describes.

The literature review examines several contemporary school leadership and ethical school leadership texts from the perspective of how they understand and apply the nature of complex open adaptive systems. It notes that a range of high profile and influential writing is unclear and inconsistent about how it represents the nature of complexity and persist in applying to schools a largely complicated systems mental model.

Fullan and Quinn, (2015), in a text on coherence, note that "mindsets matter" (p. 75) and use technical solution terms and processes such as "drivers" and "levers" to achieve coherence and do not consider complex system characteristics such as emergence, self organisation, informal authority, and sense making. Shapiro and Gross (2013) do the same in their work on turbulence in which the metaphor is used as a temporary state that can be resolved or staff can be protected from it rather than identifying what they call turbulence as the "perpetual white water" of schools that Starratt describes (1995, p. 4).

The school leadership literature reviewed rarely considers system thinking or the nature of how the system works because it is complex. Duignan is one who

examines leadership through the explicit lens of schools as “complex and dynamic organisations” (2012, p. 21). Murphy (2013) utilizes characteristics of complex adaptive social systems to explore the nature of ethical dilemmas in schools, and how principals can respond effectively. He is an example of researchers and writers who do not explicitly identify complex system thinking but apply it effectively in their writing. Caldwell in Davies and Brundrett (2010), and Cranston and Ehrich (2009) are others.

The next section uses data from the interviews to explore the findings of the literature review and the criteriological inquiry. It directly connects a sub-question from RQ2, about ethical decision-making, to this specific exploration of system thinking. There are two reasons for this. First, much of the interview data is directly relevant to the argument that schools are complex adaptive social systems. Secondly, the principals’ views support the argument that there are inevitable links between ethical dilemmas, leadership and the nature of schools as systems

Part A Section 1 RQ2 (c): Findings.

RQ2 (c): How does their [principal] practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?

Introduction

The criteriological inquiry identifies key characteristics of complex open adaptive systems and concludes that schools have those characteristics. These findings include examples from the interviews that show how principals understand their schools as complex systems. This includes implicit understanding through their practice and any explicit understanding through the descriptions of the mental models of which they are conscious.

Schools then, are complex adaptive systems although they are commonly misunderstood as complicated open systems and literature, policies, and standards are unconsciously based on that mistaken assumption. The criteriological inquiry establishes the Open Systems Criteria Framework, a tool for identifying characteristics of open systems and comparing key features of complicated and complex open systems. The Framework provides a distilled summary of the features

that establishes the theoretical position of schools as complex open adaptive social systems.

Those findings and discussion of implications are included here because of their direct and significant relevance to the school systems theory and how that theory is interpreted and acted on by the interviewed principals. Their interpretation is contrasted with the views evident in much of the literature and policy.

Findings summary: Principals practice leadership in complexity

This heading summarizes the finding that all six principals described their actions as leaders in terms consistent with a mental model of schools as open complex adaptive and social. Findings support four themes consistent with characteristics of this complexity and they are explored following a brief summary of findings. The four themes are:

- Unpredictable, surprising human behaviours.
- A sense of little control over diverse agents and organisations that influence their practice, usually associated with problems influenced outside the school that cannot be solved by the formal processes of the Department of Education or the formal authority of the principal's role.
- Problems that have multiple causes and consequences.
- Problems that are dilemmas because they represent competing ethical choices.

Findings and interview data

No participant consciously characterized the school as a system, complex or otherwise. They did not deliberately use concepts of schools as systems with particular and identifiable system characteristics as tools for understanding their leadership environment. This absence of explicit understanding of schools as systems is noted and examined in the literature review and the potential value of understanding and applying complex system thinking is discussion thread in this chapter and Chapter 6, The mental model they applied was consistent with the systems thinking described in this thesis as "the ability to see the world as a complex system, to understand how everything is connected to everything else" (Sterman, 2002, p. 2) in which you can't do just one thing" because all the parts interact with each other (Sterman, 1994, p. 291). However, they all provided evidence of a clear

working awareness of these characteristics and at the same time described particular elements of open complex systems. The quotations included here illustrate this awareness of defining characteristics of open complex social systems.

Four participants responded directly to the interviewer's verbal summary of schools as open complicated or complex systems described in the *interview process* section of Chapter 3. This was offered at the end of the first interview with an invitation to reflect at the second. An extensive comparison between the first and second interview data did not become part of the data analysis because early analysis showed that participant perceptions of shifts in their learning was limited to these specific examples.

John found the characterization of complexity useful and said that it offered new ways of understanding some of what he experienced as a principal. Cathy noted that some efforts had been made in the past at whole of organisation level to take "a complexity approach" but it was short-lived. She noted,

> People would rather work on the complicated than the complex. People want to count it. They all grew up with a register and they want to able to tick off names. Too much registering when they were young.

Ben agreed that schools were largely complex but with opportunities to better control the complicated aspects of schools. He offered a bicycle and frog analogy.

> A bike can be taken apart and put back together. The bike is still a bike. You can take a frog take apart, but you can't ever put it back together. The school is the frog. There are some system things you can get right and perfect. There are important technical things that can be done – the assault would not have happened if the system worked as it was meant too. Ben

One principal used the term 'adaptive' in their interview and explained when asked that they had participated in professional learning on adaptive leadership outside Tasmania. Their comments suggest practical application of that learning.

> I think of adaptive and culture together. How do you build that invisible theory and bond people together about what you are trying to do? It's not black and white, you're living in a space that shared space with individual people or a school within a community. It's the adaptive nature of building those relationships, building that capacity, that self-confidence. And I think

> dialogue – what does it look like, feel like, sounds like. It's hard to know what it looks like … because that's the thing about it. (The) first time I saw it … I was on an adaptive leadership course and they used the term again – technical and adaptive. And I said 'ah, ha, it's valuable to think, is this a technical challenge or is this an adaptive challenge?' How you approach those two things is very different. (De-identified)

All participants identified the characteristics of open complex social systems. They are open in that the boundaries of the school are uncertain, and the principal's role and responsibilities are not clearly defined. They are social in the sense that they are located in communities and a focal point for diverse personal relationships and interactions with formal agencies.

Several sub-themes emerged in relation to school systems. These relate directly to the features of complex adaptive social systems as explored in the literature review, summarised in the RQ1 findings and identified in the Open Systems Criteria Framework. The challenges of taking quotations out of their context and attributing them to particular themes has been noted and these are indicative of views shared by all participants but not accessible as short quotations. The narratives of Chapter 4 provide extended examples of these sub-themes:

1. Unpredictable, surprising human behaviours.
2. A sense of little control over diverse agents and organisations that influence their practice, usually associated with problems influenced outside the school that cannot be solved by the formal processes of the Department of Education or the formal authority of the principal's role.
3. Problems that have multiple causes and consequences.
4. Problems that are dilemmas because they represent competing ethical choices.

1. Unpredictable, surprising human behaviours.

All principals provide evidence supporting this understanding and it is a common theme in quotations used for other specific purposes. Deb notes unpredictability as normal business and associates it with the families and their daily lives connected to the school through the students.

> … a great thing about our job is that you turn up and you never know what is going to happen. My mum's day was pretty much mapped out. Our day we don't know – we deal with 150 odd families. 150 odd value sets and at school, some (families) have good and others bad days. Deb

2. A sense of little control over diverse agents and organisations that influence their practice

This is usually associated with problems influenced outside the school that cannot be solved by the formal processes of the Department of Education or the formal authority of the principal's role. These relationships, and how principals acknowledge and respond to them, are a defining feature of situations described by principals as ethical dilemmas and are threads throughout the interview data, the narratives and the quotations in this chapter. These quotations from Sally and John link working with the child, family, and other agencies to keep the child in school. They are representative of frustrated efforts to collaborate and negotiate with diverse stakeholders in changing circumstances and informal agreements noted by all participants. These are all representative of Poli's observations that "learning to dance" with a complex system is definitely different from "solving" the problems arising from it (2013, p, 142).

> There is quite a dense narrative behind this. This particular child is representative. We worked for a whole year with the child and the family and had quite a few agencies and people as part of the support plan. By end of year (details removed for de-identification). I looked across to my support teacher, who was crying. Beginning of this year we came back. (Specifics removed for de-identification). We distributed TA's around others. Unbeknown to me and the school, the support that he had with external agencies had stopped so the child was backed into a triple whammy – no support, no TA and after a few weeks we had several major incidents. Sally

> (Decision making) takes account of a whole heap of inputs, psychological, external support providers, people who know the family, staff, people who have conversations with the student. As a result of all that we work out what levels of support we can actually manage. John

> When you are talking about the extreme cases the 1, 2, 3 highly complex ones, and part of that dilemma and frustration for me is that that level of complexity comes back to the school. The education department will fix it, or the school will fix it, or the school will take over the responsibility for it. The school is a particular piece of the puzzle but can't be everything. Deb

This lack of continuity and predictability of control and the view that the agencies could develop a more fluid collaboration is shared across the participants and expressed in detail in Deb's interview.

> I want the child here, but these things keep happening and it's outside my jurisdiction, so you have care team meetings, case conferences – you could run those every day but at some point, what do I say? We've done our bit – I can't change housing, can't change domestic violence. At some point you have to say, 'I can't change that.' I'll report it but then I have to say, 'This is what I can do.' I've come to that through frustration. You try, and you try, and you try and then in the end it just gets repeated in the bureaucratic system. Deb

> I come from a belief that as a school system, education system, we need to be able to be fluid enough to be able to meet need. But there's still very much if you look at our schools you have subgroups that are classrooms, SRP's done to formula and all these things that are pretty rigid, but I think we need our system to be highly fluid. I'm not sure we've quite got that right yet. You look at the positive behaviour support approach within that you should be able to meet whatever the need whatever it might look like. If that child can't be here what are the possibilities? The thing I struggle with as a system is that we are not as fluid as we can be to meet need. Deb

> There are the external factors like Child Safety, legal, police, Mission Australia. What is your part in that jigsaw? Stripped of all that it should be teaching and learning. But somehow, I feel it has all been pushed onto schools and back into school. I firmly believe in where we are heading as a group. It frustrated me because I feel we should be able to run a smooth process in relation to other agencies but in reality, we're not there yet. Deb

3. Problems that have multiple causes and consequences

This sub-theme is present in many of the quotations. John's observation provides a common view that that the multiple factors are due not just to diverse agents, but an ethical commitment to "look after them."

> I've got multiple responsibilities. I've got children for starters, staff, children's families, the Department of Education. I have to look after them. And these mean multiple factors that impact every day…Doing the best by everybody, that is a constant tension. You have to sustain the tension. It's one of the best jobs in the world. John

4. Problems that are dilemmas because they represent competing ethical choices

The fundamentally ethical nature of schools is a dominant theme in the interview responses and evidence in provided the findings for RQ2, where the focus is on how principals understand the roles that ethical understanding play in their leadership. These quotations are typical of the connection between the ethical nature of schools because of their complexity and the leadership practices that the principals consider ethical and essential in their work.

> The ethic is that everyone is involved but sometimes the majority take precedence over the individual, but we never let the individual go. We have things in place to stay connected and we connect with the family. John

> So, the ethical dilemma was not that I don't know what to do but that I no longer have the time or resources to do what I know works. Sally

> My school has a very poor reputation outside [the community]. It is a geographical amphitheatre with a poor reputation so to protect the community and the school to enable the school to be sustained over time and for the community to have the best chance for a future to sustain enrolments. If I'm to get capital works and funding to sustain the future of the school, then I need to hold the school's reputation as positively as I possibly can both

within its own community, but the new vision is how we make that happen outside the amphitheatre of its own suburb. Sally

Part A Section 2: Discussion of principals' understanding of schools as systems in relation to the criteriological inquiry.

The criteriological inquiry and literature review establish that schools are complex adaptive social systems and this section applies those findings and discussion from Chapter 2 and this chapter. It focuses on the interview data about how the participating principals perceive schools as systems and addresses the RQ2 (c) question:

How does their [principal] practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?

This discussion is based on the interview data provided in the Findings section and organised around two key ideas:

1. Principals' leadership practice is closely aligned with their understanding of schools as complex systems and a practical representation of leadership consistent with the nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems.
2. Learning as an ethic in itself, and a representation of their systems thinking.

Principals' leadership practice consistent with the nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems.

Principals' practice and how they understand schools as systems are closely aligned. This key finding is a dominant theme across the findings. An important point to consider here is that principals did not name their thinking as 'system' thinking, nor were they conscious of their descriptions of responses as a coherent mental model that represents a way of seeing schools as a system as described in this chapter and extensively in the criteriological inquiry, Part A Chapter 2. While the interview data do not provide evidence of explicit understanding of complex system characteristics, principals' practice was strongly based on complexity characteristics identified in this section.

There is shared agreement that the competing needs and interests of multiple participants inside and outside the school are significant contributors to the ethical dilemmas that arise within the school. Principal practice and their understanding have several shared characteristics when considered through the lens of a systems thinking perspective. The findings of the interview data include awareness of key characteristics of open complex systems. These are used as organisers to present findings and are derived from the Open Systems Criteria Framework. They are:

- Unpredictable, surprising human behaviours,
- A sense of little control over diverse agents and organisations that influence their practice,
- Dilemmas arising outside the school that cannot be solved by the formal processes of the Department of Education or the formal authority of the principal's role,
- Problems that have multiple causes and consequences,
- Continually changing circumstances, often the result of people's interdependence as members of the school community.

The findings from the interviews show that the principals acknowledge these characteristics and respond to them in making choices for leadership action. The leadership practice principals described within the school and through engagement with outside stakeholders most often implies understanding of schools as open complex social systems. Evidence for this is included throughout the narratives and the quotations from the interview data, and is usually associated with relationships, the importance of learning, and decisions based on unique circumstances.

Most participants acknowledged an increased explicit recognition of the nature of schools as systems because of the two interviews. They all agreed in their view that school have elements of complicated system characteristics, including the importance of expert and technical knowledge, the existence of formal positions of authority and structures, codes and rules, and the responsibility of the formal leader to make decisions. Principals identified this latter characteristic as a view commonly held by staff and community members, and one that was detrimental to the culture. The other features of complicated systems were seen as having a role in leadership

but not conducive to the learning or the effective responses necessary for improving outcomes.

Learning as an ethic in itself, and a representation of systems thinking

This feature of principals' thinking is included in both the systems thinking and the ethics perspectives of the research. It is included in this systems thinking context as an essential disposition of effective individual action and shared behaviour in complex systems.

The fundamental importance of learning as a process and a practice was foundational for every principal. Three noted that they were teachers who became principals and were conscious that the importance of learning as their core purpose remained in the principal role. They all observed that they saw staff as learners and most noted the same approach to parents. One stated a view, evident in every interview, that "leading requires seeing everyone as learners."

None initially saw learning as the foundational ethic of their principalship in that they valued it most as both an outcome of their practice and the process utilized to achieve the improvements they were working towards. Their faith in the power of learning to change behaviour was acknowledged as a given when it was raised for response in interview. One summarized a shared view by observing that teachers acting as lifelong learners is part of what it means to be 'professional.'

The centrality of learning as an end in itself is not much evident in school leadership literature. The concept of *Schools that Learn* is the partial title of Senge's 2012 text, but no participants identified his long standing concept of learning organisations as a source of their thinking. Starratt's thinking on school leadership over several decades includes the powerful theme of school leaders "leading a community of learners" (2007, p. 165). Principals did not mention his work and that theme is not evident in most of the leadership textbooks included in this study. The principals commonly describe learning as a tool for change and a desired outcome. However, that construct of learning as a necessary and fundamental way of being and acting as a principal is not identified in the literature as a shared ethical principle or purpose.

Several complex system researchers and writers do note the importance of learning as a feature of complex systems. Keshavarz and Nutbeam (2010) and Heifetz (1999, 2004) include it as essential in their definition and Boulding (1956) identifies it as crucial in the eight level of systems in which he places social organization.

While the participants demonstrated little explicit awareness of their system thinking, there were high levels of compatibility between their ethical priorities, their leadership practice, and how they understood the school to work as a system. The sharp focus on learning as both a universal purpose and the most effective process for leadership combines these three elements of the whole. Learning in both senses is, for all of them, a complex, social, unpredictable process of human engagement that identifies all people as participative learners. Learning therefore unites ethical purpose, ethical leadership practice, and the engagement of diverse agents in making the best judgments at any given time. Part C further explores the connections across the three elements. The next section provides data, findings, and discussion for RQ2, the question on ethical decision making.

Part B RQ2: Findings and Discussion.

Introduction

It has been established that schools are complex adaptive social systems rather than open complicated systems. The interview data show that principals base their leadership practice on an understanding of the characteristics of complex adaptive social systems. The inevitable relationship between that complexity leadership and the constant presence of ethical considerations has also been identified. Part B applies the interview data to explore how principals understand and respond to ethical dilemmas and their broader understanding of ethical leadership. It shifts the focus from systems thinking towards ethical thinking and sub-questions (a) and (b). The systems thinking focus of sub-question (c) has been included in the Part A exploration of RQ1.

The RQ2 question and sub-questions are:

How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?

a. ***How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
b. ***How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***
c. ***How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?***

The dominant shared themes that emerged through the analysis of interview are identified, and relevant quotations are aligned with one of four main themes. The initial data analysis first identified these themes as they emerged, rather than through application of the findings of the criteriological inquiry and the literature review as initial criteria for analysis. The criteriological inquiry and the literature review findings on systems thinking and ethical thinking were compared with the initial grouping of interview data and similarities and differences are noted in the findings and discussions.

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were based on the literature review but were not focussed on particular characteristics of system thinking or ethical leadership. The interview questions for each participant generated a broadly similar structure for inviting responses, but the fluid and individual responses of participants resulted in relevant evidence uniquely distributed across the two interviews.

This summary of methodology is included here in order to illuminate the ways in which the RQ2 findings are presented and considered. The very nature of leadership in a complex open social system and the style of interview combine to produce reflections and responses that are usually multi-faceted, tightly woven and simultaneous explorations of several themes. The findings for RQ2 are, therefore, broadly identified through grouping of sometimes extended quotations with more specific findings identified within the broad groupings. Contextual relationships in participants' thinking across interconnected themes are maintained as much as possible through extended quotations where necessary, but the themes take precedence. The narratives in Chapter 4 provide evidence of the multi-faceted reflections of every principal. The next section is a focus on the data and findings relevant to RQ 2.

Part B Section 1 RQ2: Findings

RQ2: How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?

a. ***How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
b. ***How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***

The findings from the interview data are organised into four broad themes.

1. How principals describe schools as systems
2. The nature of ethical dilemmas
3. Ethical purposes of schools and their own ethical priorities
4. How principals describe the nature of ethical leadership

These themes are inclusive of both sub-questions and do not directly align with either of the two sub-questions. How principals understand ethical leadership is a distinct theme and the findings are presented as a response to that sub-question (a). How principals describe schools as systems with an emphasis on the nature of ethical dilemmas and the ethical purposes of schooling are combined as a response to sub-question (b).

This section begins with the interview data to describe findings about principals' understanding of the nature of ethical dilemmas, the ethical purposes of schools, and their own ethical priorities. A re-cap of the important relationship between principals' understanding of schools as systems, and how they act on their beliefs about the ethical nature and purposes of schools follows.

RQ 2 (a): How do principals understand ethical school leadership?

Introduction

The findings for this research question are presented under three main headings. The interview questions explicitly explored how principals understood the ethical nature of leadership and that is the first theme. The second theme is a shared and consistent view about authority and power as expressions of leadership. It identifies how those views align closely with leadership practice in complex adaptive social systems and those connections are a thread weaving through this research. The third theme is the belief in learning and collaboration as an ethic in itself, and essential to the practice

of ethical leadership. Each of the three themes have sub-themes and data as quotations from interviews are organised around these themes and sub-themes.

The ethical nature of leadership

Every participant saw school principal leadership as fundamentally ethical for several reasons. This acknowledgement of the centrality of ethical choices is consistent with complexity theory (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001) and some education writers such as Eyal et al., (2015), Haynes (1998), McDaniel and Driebe (2005), Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010), and the often cited Duignan (2012), Murphy (2013), and Starratt (2015). Relationships with children and their families, the role of the school in a community, and the short and long-term purpose of schooling were the dominant themes, and these are also features of complex systems (Table 1). These dominant priorities, combined with the ethical principles valued most by participants, and the formal policies that bound their role as Department of Education employees, create the tensions that generate the ethical dilemmas identified by all participants. Participants were explicit about, and conscious of, this ever present dynamic. The quotations on the nature of ethical leadership in this section include two broad priorities:

- Engagement
- Modelling ethical principles through their own practice, particularly decision making.

Engagement with individuals and acknowledgment of individual dignity, rights and responsibilities

These leadership priorities are demonstrated through the importance all the participants placed on the ethical principles identified earlier on maintaining and nurturing relationships with every member of the school community and understanding all individuals in the context of their family and unique needs. While all participants described their leadership with the assumption that leadership is by nature ethical, three were explicit and concise about the constant presence of ethical dilemmas at the centre of leadership.

> Ethics is daily for us. You've got that moral duty – you're here for the children but also for the staff who need support. John

> You can't be working closely with families and children unless you're dealing with ethical issues all the time. Cathy

> Ethical dilemmas are constant, every day. They are most often the rights of the individual, the needs of the individual verses what's right for the greater good, the organisation. That can be as simple as a class, a teacher, an individual. It could be around the impact on a family and what you know is going on in that family verses how that (a decision) plays out in the school community. Ben

Luke's reflections are based on matters that came to public attention. Details are removed, and the quotations focus on his priorities and practice. His story and reflections are highly relevant across most the identified themes with a particular emphasis on the importance of **care for every person** and acknowledgement of their **dignity as a human being.**

> An **ethical principal in my view thinks about a broader group**. In my view as a principal you have got to have thinking about the whole kid and the wrap around things that go with them – that is family and us. You need to think about staff and their family, so I think the ethic is to have a broader range – kids, families and teachers that you value and are really caring and concerned about. It is a whole life of those 3 groups [that has to be considered]. Luke

> In my career there have been public issues that were newspaper worthy. Things that were really turned into issues that had to be managed I suppose. The reason why I believe **these were ethics based was because of the people involved**. If you took them as, this happened therefore this consequence, then it's a different type of issue than an understanding of the people who were impacted upon by this. You don't know what to do, but what you do know is that there are people involved here, there are people who are scared, there are people who are worried, people whose careers are in doubt, including mine. But it was a dilemma, not in that X had done something absolutely wrong, that was clear. But how we deal with the people is really an important focus. Luke

The following quotation is an example of recognition of what the literature describes as the dignity of the human person driving leadership practice. John and Sally shared this ethic in their descriptions and, although dignity was not explicitly stated or suggested as strongly as Luke, there is a strong case in the all data from all principals for it to be considered as a shared motivation.

> **I think of seeing every staff member as a true person**. They don't just come in do this and teach in this way. We have got to know where they are at, why are they here…. What are the pressures on them, the older teachers now? Parents are a huge pressure - when are we going to be able to get the best out of them. They are good teachers but when are we going to introduce it and when am I going to have a clear view of the issues involving every teacher to be able to bring that in when they are ready. We have got to have an awareness of the whole person to be able to make that good decision as best we can. Luke

Modelling ethical principles through their own practice

These quotations are illustrative of the shared view that beliefs and behaviour cannot be separated. They see what they do as beliefs in action.

> It's not my job to judge, it's my job to allow students the best opportunities to succeed and for them to have the best opportunities to succeed then **I must ensure their parents can play a part in the school**. Because that's what I passionately believe in. I think that we need parents involved in the school and they [parents] both believed they were right. Luke
>
> We need to look after and support every child and we need to look after and support every teacher and we need to look after and support every parent. Every student, every parent, every day. **I need staff to know that every minute they are modelling what we want the kids to be**. Luke
>
> **When I talk about carrying the trust I refer to modelling and being relied upon to perform and demonstrate a trustful way of behaving**. As a leader you model it out front, keeping confidence, doing what you say you're going to do. Even pushing back on something you said you were going to do, it may not be what people like, but you maintain the same position. A

> dilemma in this role, is maintaining trust with one group, maybe the staff or parents and the dilemma you have when you have to or are told to break trust with your staff because you have to push the more corporate role.
> Cathy

> We have an ethical responsibility to influence everyone in an organisation we lead, putting students at the centre of what we do. It's also my responsibility for the staff and not only for their professional life but to bring trust into the organisation. So, I guess **trust is the thing that I'm carrying most.** …It's in the (Department of Education) documentation, having trustful and respectful relationships, and that we are working for the common good of the students and their families. Cathy

John notes that modelling requires support and feedback from others.

> I think the only other thing I wanted to say was that your ethics, **you have to be really clear in what you believe in so therefore you follow that process all the time and there is accountability for you**. Hopefully you have someone on staff who will come to you and say 'that doesn't fit with thing else you have done. Luke

Modelling through decision making

The following examples focus on maintaining trust and constructive relationships through decision making processes that engage everyone and take account of competing priorities including the immediate and long term effect on individuals, families and community wellbeing.

> I think **everybody in the school community has to feel that they are part of that decision.** It's ok if things happen and there is disagreement that needs to be explored and understood. It is that sense of consensus. If you are trying to change something, consensus is a majority, it is not everybody agreeing but everybody has to get their input. John

> I have to think about what my ethical responsibility is right now. I think it comes back to responsibility and leadership, so it's ethical responsibility in leadership because I've got a whole community that expects me to make the decisions that will best help their days tomorrow, then perhaps that what it

has to do with **is my ethical responsibility as a practitioner and ethical responsibility as a school leader**. Sally

Sally speaks for all participants in the way she talked about the multiple relationships she negotiates and the value to ascribe to each of them as part of leadership practice and decision-making.

> ... examples of each one of those layers, so it's like, as a principal I'm in contact with every player of the department from the minister to the child and the thing that I think is occurring that is my ethical touchstone is to be fully present at each of those layers. Sally

The particular ethic of principalship

Several participants noted the differences between the ethics of teaching and the ethics of principalship. Subsequently, participants were invited to comment on any differences in the second interview. These quotations describe their learning in the role and the lack of explicit support for that learning in the moments. The theme of a lack of acknowledgment of the significance and challenge of ethical dilemmas is also evident. The need to address this aspect of leadership is identified in the Introduction as a motivation for this research.

> I never wanted to be a Principal. It happened. I was put in a situation and I could not walk away from the community. I am a teacher who became a Principal. No-one gave me training (about ethics of being a principal) that's why I ask, 'Is this the right thing to do for everyone involved?' In the classroom it's all about connecting and relationships. It's much different in the classroom – the right thing is the well-being of children under your care. The ethics of leadership is vastly different. In class it's easy, you see them all the time. In leadership you don't know what's happening in the sub-conversations, suddenly things go boom in your face. Where did that come from? John

> I think **in my early days I was trying to please everybody because I came from a classroom base to a leadership base by accident**. I had a very good relationships with staff, my colleagues, with the parents and the students and suddenly you find yourself in a position where you actually have to make

some decisions that someone is not going to like. You fluff around it basically and there is a danger in that, where having to do the right thing is different and so there are tensions in that as well. But you just have to work through and keep the communication channels all right and open.
John

Ethics of a principal is a lot more complex than a teacher. I had a view as a teacher when I saw teachers not meeting needs and that has transferred in the purest sense, but it's not there in teaching in all its complexity. My influence to change that is much more now, **much more power and influence to change things now. Inclusive behaviours towards others is how I still think about ethical**. Cathy

I think primarily I'm a practitioner it's practically cellular I can't help it. The fact that I've become a principal simply means that I seek opportunities to share practice. I'm looking forward to the time when I can give myself some instructional role as well. I know many really good principals who have chosen teaching roles and I have asked them why, - credibility, walk the talk, love teaching, factory floor. They see themselves as I'm a music, language, science teacher who have become a principal. I'm a teacher who has become a principal. I've always been a teacher of kids who have struggled to stay in classrooms. **As a principal I'm still a teacher of kids who struggle to stay in classrooms and I happen to be a principal**. That's something I haven't articulated before. Sally

In the second interview Sally, a principal with a few years' experience, reflected on changes in her thinking about the nature of the principal role since the first interview. This quotation expresses a sharpened awareness of complexity and particular aspects of principal leadership and moving beyond 'simply…sharing practice.'

The ethical principle of the role is how do I remain fully present? I'm in the service of others in a role that required ethical presence – you cannot be ethical unless you are present. It's a precondition for ethics.

Being present for the kids, and because I'm a principal for the community, even lately for the department, how do I contribute to that, how do I be

present for that? Examples of each one of those layers, so it's like, as a principal I'm in contact with every player of the department from the Minister to the child and the thing that I think is occurring that is my ethical touchstone is to be fully present at each of those layers. And then there's my colleagues, trying really hard to be present for my principal colleagues and my teaching colleagues, but it's very hard because with my teacher colleagues I get impatient and frustrated. I'm noticing at different layers the challenges to my ethical touchstone. I find it most difficult at the moment, being present and listening and being compassionate, while at the same time holding high expectations for my teachers. That's been a real learning for me, I've not had to treat teachers before like a diverse class of students. How do I remain humble about that in the sense that I'm not treating them like I am the one who knows? I'm not the one who knows. I want to support them to get into areas for growth. Sally

Ben, with experience in several schools, reflected on a deliberate consciousness guiding his actions.

> I am more conscious now of principalship, what it means to be a principal. **Every moment is a leadership moment and I'm aware now of my behaviours**, what I say, how I dress. I continually create a consciousness of the need to change, to be clear about the purposes of the school, what the perceptions are and what the performance data says. I'll try to be as aware as I can and whether I'm doing it well. Ben
>
> Ethics has to be personalised, it has to be around who you are – you can't turn it on or off can you? I've developed a framework for what I think a good life is. They are ethical anchors – love for humanity, life has to be of service, and you have to treat life as an experience, to accept things and experience things. Anything I do in the school has to give messages about our three values – safety, learning and respect. Ben

As a follow up to these reflections, Ben was asked about the relationship between his personal framework and the three school values. He noted that they were closely aligned and, "You couldn't run it for long if they weren't. In the job you have conversations about how life should be."

Authority and power as expressions of ethical leadership

The nature of authority and the use of power featured in every participant's response. The formal authority of the role was accepted as a responsibility by all participants as was its limited application, particularly in the context of ethical dilemmas. The reality of the role that the concepts of influence and emergence play in organisation culture is acknowledged and the importance of learning, acceptance of shared responsibility, and engagement and commitment from all stakeholders (Thygeson, 2010) is identified. The importance and value of informal authority and shared accountability are common threads. These are also features of complex systems and complex system thinking as described in Chapter 2.

Illustrative examples are:

Informal authority

(Formal authority and power are) pretty much irrelevant to the way I manage a school. It matters perhaps in a couple of instances to parents when they are looking to question a teacher's approach or something like that, for me to be able to say, wearing a principal's head, no that approach is just fine, your child will be ok, or no I need to unpack that and have a chat about that and then I will get back to you. It's dealing with issues where people want to find out something from a higher authority and that's probably the only way. I have never even as a teacher looked at it as a power based industry. Luke

Ethical principles drive decisions

It's not loyalty to the person in authority that drives me. I say to my staff, 'No' when they say, 'I will do what you tell me because you're the boss.' I say to them that they will do it because it is the right thing to do**.** John

Building adaptive decision-making

The notion of traditional power at the school does not exist. There are moments when I've got to say you've got to do this for this reason. But generally, we are in an adaptive space around building capacity, a culture is very much driven around we are trying to work on differentiating, building

relationship and trust all based on this is where we are heading for this reason. Deb

Shared accountability and responsibility

With me its try, feel, trial, discuss – an organic distribution of power. With others in the school, they want to gate keep, to control. I don't think I'll change those personalities – technical, positional authority. There are views, including parents about traditional school structures. Cathy

It comes down to everybody expects that the chair [John points to the principal's chair in his office] is responsible for the whole school. There was an expectation when I came to the school that I would change things but within months there has been no culture change. It takes a bit longer than that. I actually feel that the finger has been pointed a lot at the chair but at the same time when people walked in they deferred to the chair and I don't want people to do that. They don't have to take the final bat, I am at fault if it is not working. I have an important job here cause it's a big chair, but I am no more important that the teachers in the school who are doing their jobs. I have a different role. I want the kids to respond to anyone in the school whether it is the office staff, the grounds people or me, they should respond the same way. John

… schools can't exist as isolated agencies. Principals who think they can be responsible on their own are on a hiding to nothing. Cathy

Learning and collaboration as ethical practice

This section complements the focus on learning as a feature of complexity in the Part A findings and discussion. The ways in which participants described decision making and engagement of staff, students, parents and the community in decision making also suggest a shared view about the relationship between ethical decision making and formal and informal authority. Several were specific in stating that shared decision-making is a characteristic of ethical leadership. There was also a view that decisions made through collaborative learning provide the basis for legitimacy in exercising the formal authority of the principal role. These quotations

also capture the themes of the importance of learning as an ethical position itself and an essential process for change.

> It's not okay to just wander through (a classroom) and pick up on things you don't like the look of. It depends on what the culture is to enable that, takes a long time to get to the point where the teacher is not going to feel really anxious and concerned. ... now we have the feeling that we are working on something together when we've made those decisions … When the teacher has consistently used a practice that would not improve say spelling and there is a practice that has been shown to be not high leverage, … and you get a situation where the teacher says I can't teach it the way you have talked about, I'm going to do it my way. After a year and a half**, I don't feel morally compromised in saying the big picture is this, the individual support has been this, the collaborative work has been this and you're still resisting, then I'm prepared to push back on that.** I'm not going to do that unless I feel confident that there is the structure and support which has created the trust with others. So, I don't have an ethical dilemma in that because I feel that, what's driving me is that we are responsible for the well-being of those children. Cathy

> We are all responsible for the students in our school, we have a collective responsibility for every child regardless of whether they are in your class or not. Cathy

> **One of the ethical dilemmas that I face is that we are a school that has gone from a management scenario to a learning environment** and by that I mean that when I got there the behaviour was very challenging and I think we were not having a lot of dialogue or discussion around what I would call learning. So the very first thing we needed to do was really to get an orderly learning environment in place and then to get a common direction process a common language across the school. Then we started to be able to talk about learning which needs to be the core business. Deb

> When I look at others who just say this is the way we do it and whatever has happened previously, or if people are wedded to that practice, you just go – that isn't any good. When I came here, (my approach was to say) 'we are

doing it this way.' It was radical change without respect for what had gone on before and filtered through to all other areas of change. Large numbers wedded themselves to the history and protected it rather than start with the question what is the most high leverage action we need to start with and bring the staff with us. I see that as unethical because it doesn't engage people professionally. Cathy

One thing that struck me was that people said well you're the principal. I'll just do it. I say that we are adults and there has to be a collective strength in what we do, there has to be. It can't just be my vision. There has to be a collective notion of how we get there. There are times when you say look guys this is not going to make everyone happy, but we obviously have to do this, we have to write a procedure and follow – there's technical stuff we just have to do the school has got to work, timetable, policy procedures, structures have to be in place. The greatest strength is in the conversation that you want to have with the staff – that builds the collective strength, the collective vision to get there. Deb

The technical bit of the dilemma had to be [kept] in my head, [it] doesn't take a long time to do the rules, possible consequences. The job then is to go to the people and say, 'okay, how are we going to handle this? The teacher made a mistake, they are a member of our community, what do you think should happen?' For the good of the community we can move on with an educative process – that's what we do after all. We are always thinking from that perspective. Luke

As a principal, if you believe in something you have actually got to do it so that clarity of being transparent is important**; being transparent about when you are taking people's opinion or whether you are not. If this is a 'my' decision, I don't need your input on that, that's my call, don't make out it's not**. Sometimes there is a 'this is the way we are going to do it' and it might be a team decision, or it might be mine and it may not be perfect, that's fine. I am not going to wait until we get the perfect thing based on our knowledge and not on practical stuff that we need to do. We need to do it and then we need to reflect. If we need to change it on the way through we'll be talking about that, but we can't keep planning, we have to make a start and

then we will be looking at it and talking all the time about how it went. Luke

A cultural shift is an ethical thing. Everything you do and don't say makes the culture. You have to work with the staff to establish an agreement about how we are as a school. Ben

The next quotation links complexity, learning, and ethical priorities with what it means to be an ethical leader and is representative of the constant hard choice work between right vs right as 'part of the jigsaw puzzle' (Deb).

When you are talking about the extreme cases the 1, 2, 3 highly complex ones, and part of that dilemma and frustration for me is that that level of complexity comes back to the school. The education department will fix it, or the school will fix it, or the school will take over the responsibility for it. **The school is a particular piece of the puzzle but can't be everything.** For a long time, we've tried to do that and in doing that we have muddied the waters a little bit and lost the sense of what we are trying to do. That's happening at X where learning was not even on the table and now we are talking about learning. That's not okay for the X hundred kids – our aspirations should not change because of that postcode that's something that I hold very, very dear. Deb

That's been a real learning for me, I've not had to treat teachers before like a diverse class of students. How do I remain humble about that in that not treating them like I am the one who knows? I'm not the one who knows. I want to support them to get into areas for growth. Sally

Relationships with formal decision-making and line managers

This finding is relevant as an example of how the principals understand line management authority as employees and the role of line managers in responding to ethical dilemmas. The relationship between principals and employer agencies in the context of ethic leadership is discussed in the literature review and is a thread in this chapter. In summary, the interview data show that the principals do not see themselves as separate or in conflict with 'the centre' but nor do they see line managers as sources of advice about ethical dilemmas.

The organisation context of the 'Department' did not figure prominently for any participant, but all participants shared some themes to varying degrees. In most cases, direct quotations and particular cases cannot be de-identified. The two included here are representative of all participants. They were largely positive about line managers and the Department of Education as sources of sound advice on technical issues around rules and procedures. They all described informal networks of support regarding ethical dilemmas and did not see individuals in formal roles as sources of support. Some noted that their relationships with these officers were positive and constructive but were not of the sort suitable for sharing ethical tensions and uncertainties.

> As a leader, I won't make that call for my own self. It takes into account a whole heap of other inputs where – psychological, external support providers, senior staff, people who know the family, people who know that as conversation with the students, with staff and at what levels we think we can actually manage that. I'm thinking of one kid at the moment who I simply can't have in the school but he will be able to come in eventually when we work through a whole heap of factors. But ultimately it comes down to my call to learning services who invariably back us on those ones. That is one thing I am really confident about because it is all evidence based. We put everything around the kid.
> John

> I've got a strong network of people I can talk with. It's confidential, high trust. The good thing is that we don't always do the same thing, we have similar things we want to do. I can get technical advice from Department people – they are different sorts of conversations. If it's a true dilemma I don't go to them. They are bound to talk to you within a process set by the Department. That's not to say that it's not personalised, it is. I can pick up the phone and talk to old principals and say, 'what would you do?' I think other principals have similar set ups. De-identified

Three participants noted negative experiences with line managers and the Department regarding dilemmas concerning involvement of politicians, the media, and interest groups. These are too specific to include, and two participants chose not to share their experiences as cases for reflection because of potential negative effects

on their wellbeing of the recall. A shared element of their characterization of the cases was pressure to act in the interests of 'political' priorities.

Two participants specifically identified an ethical dilemma concerning the requirements for them to accept and accommodate teachers whom they believed were not suitable as teachers. One participant expressed a view shared by two others.

> (It's) on the edge of moral compromise when you have to work with someone who is clearly not up to the job and when and they bob up in different schools. We will deal with it but it's not the simplistic way to deal with it. There has to be a process but if you put kids at the centre it's not really the way to go. De-identified

This quotation touches on a view expressed by every participant. They all saw themselves as committed representatives of a larger organisation and their membership of the Department of Education in positive terms. There was no evidence of a view that their ethical practice was conducted outside or despite the formal codes, plans, and culture of the Department. This observation is relevant in the context of some ethical leadership literature considered in the literature review and explored in the Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion that examines tensions between personal ethical priorities and the professional requirements of an employing agency. Two noted tensions as a consequence of being part of a broader organisation.

> You've got this tension between what's actually possible in the role bearing mind what is our core business from the Department and what it is that actually makes a school run efficiently and run successfully and has sustainable change over time. The dilemma is that if you're about transformational leadership, looking at modelling relationships to your followers, the way you build trust, and then you have just working on student achievement at the core of what you do. Then you have the ethical dilemma of the cost of what time you have between working and sleeping. I suppose what I believe is that I don't know that the job can be done both ways well. De-identified.

> There is an expectation from the Department to work in a certain way. The Department wants you working as an instruction leader working in the

classroom. You know that if you do that a large part of your job becomes waving in the wind, waiting for something to go wrong. De-identified

The interview question framework included this issue for exploration. The issue was not raised by participants except in some specific situations mentioned above. On the few occasions where a follow up probe question was appropriate, any responses described a constructive and aligned relationship as described in the findings. The Department as a barrier or opponent to their preferred ethical practice is not evident.

RQ2 (b) Findings: How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?

The data and findings are organised around three themes:

1. How principals describe schools as systems.
2. The nature of ethical dilemmas.
3. Ethical purposes of schools and their own ethical priorities.

How principals describe schools as systems

RQ1 included findings from the interview data about principals' understanding of schools as systems. The theme is further developed here as it relates more specifically to ethical purposes and principles and the practice of ethical leadership. A foundational finding is that each of these themes are part of a coherent conceptualisation, of all participants, of leadership practice as unavoidably driven by ethical principles arising from the essential nature of schools. They describe leadership practice in terms of human interactions in the context of the school, the local community, and the broader context of government policies and administrative structures. All of these interactions are based on a range of ethical priorities, and consequently decision making often involves ethical dilemmas in making hard choices between competing interests. The quotations are usually examples of this fabric of interwoven threads in that they simultaneously include several of the themes. Every participant identified the categories here as part of that fabric.

The nature of ethical dilemmas

This section explores how principals understand the nature of ethical dilemmas and the ways in which their ethical principles and purposes as principals interact with the ethical purposes of schooling. All the participants described a shared suite of ethical principles and priorities and they shared a common language.

The major principles and priorities are always considered in their practice of leadership and decision-making. They were applied in the particular circumstances and in the ongoing context of the **best interests of students, staff, the school and the community and the tensions between them**. The specific and interconnected principles and priorities are:

- Best interests of students, staff, and the school community and the tensions between them.
- Individual student interests and majority student interests.
- Safety and individual rights.
- Rights – multiple.
- Dilemmas due to family and community context.
- Competing priorities and tensions.

Interview data from interviews are used to explore each of these separately. The data were collected when participants were invited early in the interview to describe an ethical dilemma they had experienced. The complexity of the circumstances and their decision-making are illustrated in their examples. The quotations included in this section represent participants' beliefs in action because they were located in a narrative about a particular ethical dilemma.

One participant commented, "It depends what you mean by ethical," and he was invited to give it his own meaning. No other questions about defining the term were asked before or during interview and no explanations were given in preparation for participation. A major theme of deciding what is most important in the circumstances and making hard choices between multiple ethical priorities summarizes the nature of a 'dilemma' for the principals. These representative quotations also continue to identify features of open systems, both complicated and complex. Ethical principles guiding principal practice in response to ethical

dilemmas are identified and competing ethical and strategic priorities are noted as sources of tension.

These expressions of principal practice are consistent with those of Duignan (2014), Heifetz (1994), Murphy (2013), and Starratt (2005), and descriptions of balancing competing priorities in unique circumstances. Bogoth and Shields (2014), in their extensive text, present a different concept of ethical principalship. They describe a need for principals to act decisively as agents for promoting justice and addressing injustice as the clear priority for all decisions. The principal responses do not demonstrate that clarity of purpose although they identify the often cited ethical priorities of care and rights. However, the realities of balancing the tensions in caring for everyone and acknowledging their rights are immediately evident.

The quotations supporting each of the themes each have a unique flavour but are representative of all participants. Some are lengthy because the power of the example requires some context to present the competing interests and the emotions and relationships involved.

Best interests of students, staff, the school, and the community, and the tensions between them.

The ethical dilemmas arise when I know what I have to do to care for the child but at the moment I'm afraid that my decision is going to back the teacher (in the particular example). So, I know that I've broken my ethical responsibility to the child. I know I've reneged on my ethical responsibility for the child, that's how it feels and that's why it's intimate. The word intimate for me is because I'm feeling it deeply. Sally Individual student interests and majority student interests.

> The dilemma is that everyone is involved but sometimes the majority take precedence over the individual. But we never let the individual go. We have things in place to stay connected and we connect with the family. John

Safety and individual rights.

> Safety is physical, and first and foremost. We have students here who have threatened and assaulted staff and students multiple times and we have also got that level of threat, of discomfort that cause people, students and adults,

to feel unsafe. There is that point where what is safe and what is not safe and where does that line fit? For some people, their tolerance is higher for certain students because we look at their story but does that take away the threat or take away the potential for violence. Of course, there is always that dilemma when you know a student is not able to respond in the school. We have got probably X kids who are on external programs at the moment. I would love them to be in the school, but it is a safety issue and that does create all kinds of issues for the other learners and kids in the school plus the staff. John

One of the dilemmas I have is that we still have unsafe behaviour towards staff or other students and behaviour that can in effect obstruct learning for the majority. One of the things I struggle with is the notion of suspension … if you're having to go for ongoing suspension what is the effect for that particular child, or part time enrolment so what are you sending that child home to. Is that the best option? … for me it's how you meet everyone's needs but knowing you need to provide a safe workplace and school environment. Deb

Rights – multiple

Rights is what makes it an ethical dilemma. All children have a right to learn and if we can't fulfil that right then there is the risk of expense to society. So, if we can fulfil our obligations for the rights of every child, such as in the strategic plan to have a fulfilling life and a future as a member of our society then when we have an ethical dilemma about whose rights I am going to protect first what is it I need to do. Sally

Dilemmas due to family and community context

The following quotations have a context of children in dysfunctional social and family contexts. The themes of ongoing intricate relationships, understanding the

child's social/ family context and the tensions created for the principal by competing and incompatible priorities are combined in the reflections.

> There is a lot of work in the background to **build relationships and trust** – the mother knows that you'll do everything you can to keep the child in school before just sending them home or without what service there might be. Understanding the situation helps the professionals and staff to understand where that parent is at. My major motivation is to try to understand why it is this way. We can be dismissive or make decisions without understanding. Cathy

Competing priorities and tensions

> You come to the decision (to remove a child from school) when the overall direction of where you are going and what you have set up and what is valued at the school is truly challenged. When you've tried every option you conclude that **this isn't equity because others don't have choices.** It can become so unsafe that I've really got to look at the values of our Department and what we run our school around. When it means the needs of the group are not being met, then it's not okay. So, you have that struggle, that tension. Then you have the issue of the safety of that child when they are not in school.
>
> So, a dilemma which arose very specifically, and they tend to be very specific dilemmas not the bigger brushstroke ones necessarily is how do I weigh up the wellbeing of a child and the wellbeing of the staff member and the school. [A series of events] cornered me into a situation where I said, 'right I am going to have to protect the reputation of the school first. I could have it on the cover of the paper. Straight away I projected to the front page of the paper, what the potential heading was going to be and what will this do to the reputation of the school and the community and what will this do to the Department. So, I feel very much like when things go wrong or have that potential then I go to that headline and think right I have to protect the school and the department. Parents are often not readily available so there's some

> political activism goes on or some social action at work too, so there's some work for me outside my job about how I get support for this child. Luke

> In the case of boys assaulting another boy, how do you work ethically effectively through that to enable a solution? I try to work out an ethical, the right framework to deal with that. Who is the victim, who is most at risk, what the first and highest priorities? Who is the most effected in that situation? There is a whole complex background to all the students. You know all about them. I know what I'll do but it will be resolved in a way that meets all the needs. That's the dilemma in the end. How can we live with those kids' families? They were suspended. The ethical dilemma is that there has to be an outcome, but the more important powerful part is the message it sends about the greater good, to the victim, teachers and people who know it happened. It's a public statement that it's not on. It's not necessarily the best for the suspended and that is an ethical dilemma in itself. All the players are of equal value and its important how I support the three. Ben

Ethical dilemmas in the unique context of schools

Two participants have had roles in senior positions outside schools and reflected on some differences. Their observations raise the question of the unique ethical circumstances of schools and therefore the potential need to differentiate between the ethical contexts of generic 'educational' leadership and school leadership.

> The dilemmas I have come across in terms of outside of schools have centred on bureaucratic tensions and policy. But in school it tends to be a bit more intimate. So as a principal I feel a great deal more tension between my inner world as a practitioner principal and the outer world of what it means to lead or manage and administer a school. De-identified

> What they do is very much dependent on the political and that is a different moral purpose verses our core business when we get to the coal face. Principals are in an uncomfortable place. Sometimes Principals push that (political agenda) right down into classrooms and I think that those schools are often unhappy and struggling with trust and relationships. The closer you

are to the political dimension and you are prepared to be lacking the collaborative side of things. De-identified

These observations are consistent with the characteristics identified in the literature review section, *a school system theory within complex adaptive social theory*. The unique nature of the complexity schools of is explored in that section and these quotations are consistent with several of the features.

Ethical purposes of schools and their [principals'] own ethical priorities

The nature of ethical dilemmas explored in the analysis identifies shared themes that populate the choices and tensions of school leadership decision making. This section offers further specific examples to illustrate these themes. No participant mentioned ethical leadership literature or theory in their reflections about the principles and purposes guiding their practice.

Ethical purposes permeate most quotations in these findings and this section provides more detail, with particular attention to causes of tension. The purpose of **individual student learning was clear for all participants, with a range of reasons given for why the learning is important for everyone both as a process and as an end in itself**. There was a shared view about the particular ethical purposes of schools, and their own ethical priorities as principals were commonly shared, with particular importance varying across participants. Three made specific reference to personally held beliefs guiding their lives. The themes introduced in the section on the nature of ethical dilemmas are expanded here. Safety and equity are priorities woven through all descriptions of ethical dilemmas. Two priorities were particularly important:

- Rights: competing rights, balancing competing rights, and keeping in mind responsibilities as well as rights.
- Learning and student achievement.

While these are identified in leadership and ethical school leadership literature, no participant linked their own views and practice to the literature or any particular source. Several mentioned their personal school and family experience as children as sources of their ethical priorities; these could not be de-identified

sufficiently to include as coherent quotations. One made particular mention of 'social justice.' This is a common priority in literature but infrequently mentioned by participants. Three made specific mention of **a deliberate awareness of overarching beliefs or a broader ethic that guides their practice.**

These quotations from the interview transcripts are representative of the foundational principles and motivations that every participant was able to describe. Each principal offered a unique, personal mixture of beliefs and motivations.

> I don't know why, I was intuitively triggered about **social justice** as a student and what I saw in teaching was what I felt as a student. There are wonderful things written about ethics and justice and morality, but I think what you end up doing on reflection is saying currently in this situation what does it mean for my life, world. What does it mean for me right now in the role I'm in? **Ethics for me is not negotiable- it is about care for other.** It's really hard but whatever I have in mind I make decisions on what is best for other. De-identified
>
> I wrestle with the question, **is there an absolute right or absolute good?** Is there an absolutely correct response? It was absolutely wrong for those three boys to attack that boy. But there's a response beyond that. Education is a strong moral purpose, a highly ethical enterprise and there are some universal broader rights, such as the right to education. The ethical questions are also:
>
> 'where's the growth, where's the improvement, where's the better world?' Ben
>
> I've got to look after the **best interests** of why we're there. We're there for the kids. A colleague asked what my 'moral imperative' was. 'It's about the kids.' John
>
> I'm in the service of others in a role that required ethical presence. You **cannot be ethical unless you are present.** It's a precondition for ethics. Sally
>
> **Ethical is about doing what is right**. How do you define what is right and balance the rights of all the players- state versus school, family versus another family? also the notion of the broad view. If you're acting ethically, a couple of things define it. One would be that I take the time and space to look

broadly at the picture. Rather than just look at the three kids alone, that would be unethical. You have to take account of the families. Ben

It's the fact that a teacher could have an entire community go through his or her classroom. Each individual teacher has the capacity to work with a whole community. That's how I see it. **It's about building community**. If you can build a love, if you've got a teacher who engages and inspires then I would hope that there would be a knock-on effect to the next generation. Deb

The thing that fundamentally drives what I do is probably **excellence around public education**. We have to get it right. We've got to provide the best possible public education environment because fundamentally our children only get one choice. This school is their school and where that school is should not make a difference. What should make a difference is that I have someone with great instructional practice who is ready to go for the day and it doesn't matter what school it is. Deb

In school setting, **every child deserves an education**. With that goes a set of expectations on the system for schools to provide that. That's fundamental and in the law, it's what makes it a better society – universal access to an education. Ben

Ben provided reflections on the indicators of performance he uses for internal review. Using events as opportunities for improvement is a practice shared by other participants and explicitly described by Ben.

I have to walk away feeling good about it – that I have dealt with it in a way that corresponds, mirrors values that I espouse and represent as the leader I want to be. They have to marry for me to say I dealt with it ethically. My feel good indicators are; I've done all I could, I've thought about it from the point of view of what I and the school can do without blaming anybody, what will seek improvement, have I **balanced the rights of everyone**. Ben

One participant was explicit about having a 'social justice' activist role beyond the long-term community benefits of learning and school community improvement.

It's about seeing the role as the possible/ impossible. That's maybe why I see my role as activism because activism by its nature is impossible, ceasing

> worldwide oppression and things like this. But you play your part on the stage. What I want my way in the world to be about is **a social justice way of being in the world, ludicrously large problem but it's my way and principalship is an opportunity to play a part**. Organisations, by their very nature, cannot fulfil their ethical obligations because it's an organisation only individuals in the organisations can be ethical. So, what's my obligation as an individual in the department? The fact that X is on the strategic plan [means little]. I ask is excellence occurring, is equity occurring? Because the organisation won't do that. De-identified

The following quotations identify specific examples of the ethical principles that are usually considered in the ethical school leadership literature discussed in the literature review.

Specific ethical principles: rights, learning and equity.

The three themes evident in the data are competing rights, learning and student achievement and equity.

Rights: competing rights, balancing competing rights, and keeping in mind responsibilities as well as rights.

> So, I think there's a constant dilemma constantly there for me about **whose rights I am protecting.** I think as a principal I am compelled to protect the rights of the staff member but as a practitioner, I am compelled to protect the rights of the student first. Sally

> **Safety and learning** are the two things all the time. Broader ethic of the potential impact on the **reputation of the school**. Social media can mean that things can get away. It's a massive issue for us. Ben

Rights is what makes it an ethical dilemma.

Two principals are quoted for this example and their understanding is shared by the other four.

> All children have a right to learn and if we can't fulfil that right then there is the risk of expense to society, so we must fulfil our obligations for the rights of every child. Sally

I want to create a world where all of those kids (with challenging behaviours) and their families, also feel they have **a right to come to school and feel safe**, and that they know about how to grow, to learn how to do that. Ben

You (as principal) have rights and you also have responsibilities – to students and staff. In schools with high expectations **people put their responsibilities before their rights** and that's when you're really humming along. Ben

In a school setting **the people employed have rights, the other kids have rights, and families have rights**. Where that can clash is what I call the basic two – safe at school and learning. Everything is fine as long as someone doesn't impinge on the rights of other people. Where a student starts impinging on the rights of others ability to learn. That can happen the other way where the teacher does not create the space for learning, they have that responsibility. Ben

Learning and student achievement

Every principal identified this as a significant priority. The literature does not give learning the same ethical importance and the range of quotations is included to illustrate its ethical importance to the principals. Several of these identify ethical priorities of safety and students first as means to learning.

We **are accountable to the students**, the clients. I don't believe we should be accountable to the numbers the DoE [Department of Education] wants from us. As far as teaching them (students) our job is to get the best out of the individual child and whatever that is. It has to be improved from when they walk in the door. De-identified

Definitely, first do no harm is the absolute ethical bottom line. We've all experienced things in schools that have done more harm than good. Teacher behaviour cannot be allowed to do harm. Then we also have to make sure that they (students) are engaged in an **educational program that meets their needs**. Cathy

It's **about the learning**, that's what we are here to do. We need to be a safe place, a place where they know they can be safe but at the end the day we

have a responsibility too. That instructional work and learning is fundamental. A child can't colour in tractors all day because it keeps him calm. That's not education. Deb

I think my job is to make sure I can walk up to every teacher at the end of the day and say, 'Did you improve your children's lives today?' and they would say, 'Yes.' John

The purpose of my role as a Principal is to ensure and enable that students leave school with the best possible educational provision that they can get in their grade 6 year. Cathy

I think you still need to keep clearly in mind that every child deserves to be educated and every child deserves to be given opportunities of success. Luke

We know that change puts people in a place of being uncomfortable and then people hold their corners based on their main values. So, if respect is not one of your main top three, loyalty and trust – if they are not you're top three, but **student achievement (drives your actions**), then that is where you get a crisis, dilemma because you've got a different value set and you can't find the middle ground. Cathy

Equity

Equity as a concept permeates all reflections on ethical dilemmas and is evident in the quotations in the section. The principals did not often mention the term 'equity' as a summary term. They appear to take its importance as a given. One noted that it is stated in the department plan.

DoE values are our values and they fit right up top. And from them everyone is treated respectfully, and equity is always there. How we work has a high level of morality and we are a respectful place that is inclusive. Our agreed priority drivers are the things that will make those things happen. Deb

Unique school based relationships

Three participants described their ethical practice in a particular personal way that perhaps represents **the unique long term and intimate relationships that develop**

in schools between staff and students in ways not facilitated in other institutional, service providing organisations. Apart from the emotional flavour of these reflections, they represent an ethical dimension of long term consequences for individuals and society of which all participants were mindful.

> Children need to access high quality teaching. Parents have children who will be active contributors to the world, pay taxes, run with life and be excited about life. That's what you have to put back into the community. What will my students say to me when I'm walking along the street with a Zimmer frame? You've done everything to make them the next guys on the stage**.** De-identified
>
> When I'm in my nursing home when I'm 90, I really would like people to be really literate and numerate. We have a responsibility about the gap – to ensure that we get this right to the best of our ability and it's not okay to be mediocre. De-identified
>
> I always say if I meet this kid in a dark alley in the future I want them to go 'he treated me fairly.' So, I'll live more quietly and so it comes down to self-preservation as well although every human being has a right to education to be safe. De-identified

Summary

This section has focussed on the findings from the interview data about principals' understanding of the characteristics of ethical dilemmas that arise in schools. It has also provided data about the beliefs and motivations that the principals consider most important.

Part B Section 2 RQ2: Discussion

RQ2: How are principals' approaches to ethical decision-making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?

a. How do principals understand ethical school leadership?
b. How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?
c. How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?

The interview data are the source of this discussion and the interview quotations provided in the Findings section are specific data examples on which this discussion is based. The discussion is a synthesis of the findings for this question and the sub-questions, about how principals respond to ethical dilemmas and their understanding of ethical leadership. The findings of the criteriological inquiry into schools as systems also contribute to the discussion. Literature connections are not often directly relevant in this discussion of the themes that derive from the interview data. Associations are noted where relevant, and there is potential to examine the degrees of alignment between principals' perceptions of their reality and relevant literature.

The discussion is organised under five headings. Each heading includes a dot point summary or discussion of conclusions based on the data findings. These observations contribute to the overall research themes presented in Part C. The headings are:

1. Ethical purposes of schools and principals' own ethical priorities.
2. Ethical leadership practice (rather than leadership as a role).
3. The nature of ethical dilemmas and how principals respond.
4. The particular ethical principles identified by principals.
5. Principles evident in principals' responses to ethical dilemmas.

1. Ethical purposes of schools and their own ethical priorities

These observations identify the strongest threads woven from the combined data presented in the sections addressing the research questions and sub-questions. They are identified specifically here and are included in further discussion in this section and in Part C.

- The fundamental and agreed ethical purpose of schools is individual student learning.
- There is a core agreed set of ethical principles of rights and responsibilities, safety of students and staff, and care and respect for students, families, and staff.
- Long term purposes for schooling are represented through the immediate value of student learning. The principals explicitly identify these deeper purposes and they include a better community, fulfilling lives, and replacing disadvantage with choices.

2. Ethical leadership practice (rather than a role)

All principals characterized leadership as a practice rather than a role. The literature review discusses how both of these perspectives are evident in the literature. The principals' view represents the theory proposed by MacIntyre (2007) and illuminated by Murphy (2013). The differences are explored, linking the main findings for the research questions. In summary, a practice is the actions taken in response to what is understood as the particular value and purpose of the work, while a role is defined by the codes, standards, and position descriptions of the position. Shapiro (2010, 2013) tends to take the latter position.

Leadership as ethical practice has some distinct characteristics, summarized here.

- Schools are by their nature ethical enterprises because they are made up of people, located within communities, and driven by diverse relationships and perceptions of what is most important. Ethical dilemmas are therefore a normal part of school life and choices of ethical priorities are at the core of principalship (Branson & Gross, 2014; Duignan, 2012; Murphy, 2013; Starratt, 1991, 2014).
- Ethical leadership practice is based on a belief that learning is both the fundamental purpose of schools and the ethical and effective means of doing their leadership work. The learning process builds shared agreements. That learning process and the resultant agreed understanding establish a legitimate basis for principal leadership. This suggests that learning is an ethic in itself. Senge (2014) and Gronn (2000) identify the importance of a learning culture in organisations but the principals' view of learning identified in this study is not captured in the literature reviewed.
- Ethical principalship is largely the everyday pragmatic application of these ethical processes and principles in particular circumstances. Ethical leadership is therefore a relational and situational practice (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Murphy, 2013)
- There is a shared language of phrases and word choice with some variations of meaning and little conscious awareness of ethical leadership theory, literature or explicit professional learning.

3. The nature of ethical dilemmas and how principals respond

Principals identified similar characteristics about ethical dilemmas and shared responses to them.

- Responses are characterized as deciding action through balancing the rights of different individuals and groups while taking account of short and long term consequences for individuals, the school, and its community.
- Rights includes doing the right thing, protecting the legal rights of everyone, and upholding the "right to learn."
- All participants agreed that ethical dilemmas arise in the context of multiple factors of families, social and economic circumstances, unique individual needs and potentially conflicting interests between students, families, staff, and Department of Education policies.
- Knowledge of the family and personal circumstances of every person is a necessary condition of ethical decision-making.
- There is a shared recognition and appreciation of their membership of the Department of Education and awareness of regulations and requirements but very little perception of the department or senior officers as resources.

The participating principals all agree that schools are fundamentally ethical because their purposes are associated with the quality of life of students as adults, "setting kids up for life," and for the benefit of the local school community. The unique mixture of ethical considerations therefore informed their responses. Some identified particular issues of justice. This was generally seen as both a short and longer term purpose, achieved through the immediate well-being and quality of learning of every student in the school and improved life opportunities in the long term. The shared view is that "we are here for the individual child" as the foundational priority.

Most of the ethical dilemmas chosen by principals in interview arose from the behaviours of individuals that risked either the safety of others or their access to learning and decreased the quality of the learning environment. This usually meant students and included behaviour of community members and the practice of teachers.

This understanding of responding to ethical dilemmas includes recognition of the importance of relationships with diverse agents outside the construct of schools as an organisation defined mainly by the rules and roles that define it as a workplace. The principal's construct of 'school' is consistent with complexity theory's fuzzy boundaries, uncertainty and importance of the influence of all agents rather than the workplace characterization that Gronn (2000, 2009) and Spillane (2001, 2008) apply in examining distributed leadership.

4. Particular ethical principles identified in the interview data

The principals shared a suite of ethical principles they identified as beliefs and motivations for leadership action. These specific elements are common in the ethical leadership literature.

Being safe

Being safe is a means to those ethical ends and an end in itself for students and staff. One principal identified their formal responsibility of safety in the context of a school and workplace and everyone described it in terms of a basic right and an ethical driver of practice. Emotional and physical safety of individuals and groups is a significant consideration in responding to ethical dilemmas.

Care

Care (Noddings, 2006) for students, staff and student families as a means to improving learning is a shared priority and care as an end itself is also an ethical principle for most. One principal paraphrased a shared view in noting that the care was through an educator's lens rather than that of a parent. The expression of what care meant varied across participants. Those expressions included being of service, being 'fully present,' 'care for other,' care and respect for everyone 'as a true person' and taking care of people as an expression of love.

Responsibility for all

The sense of **responsibility for all**, doing 'the right thing' by everyone, was a strongly stated motivation shared by all participants. While the most important priority was the children, every principal identified the importance of understanding their families and their individual circumstances. This understanding of family and

personal circumstances also extended to staff. Shapiro, Gross and Stefkovich (2010, 2013) broadly explore the importance of these relationship through a focus of how the best interests of students might be best interpreted. The literature review explores the argument and the principals' specific concern of relationships with families is not captured in their texts.

The expression of care and responsibility through understanding family and community context and personal circumstances was important to all principals and several saw it as a necessary element of ethical decision-making. Three stated the view that it would be unethical to make decisions without that knowledge and that view is implied in all the responses in that everyone included direct engagement with families as a necessary part of decision making.

Leadership as ethics in action

All participants saw their leadership as ethics in action as a consequence of the combinations of the moral/ ethical purposes of schools and the relationships with children and their families. The centrality of ethical considerations in decision-making is a feature of complex systems (Heifetz, 1994), as are multiple social and emotional relationships (Hazy et al., 2007). Three participants had experience in leadership outside schools and had a shared view about the differences. Principalship creates an 'intimacy' and immediacy in the direct relationships with families and the community and the multiple consequences of events and decisions are immediate and personal. The personal nature of the relationships requires building and maintaining trust and that requires constant and consistent modelling of beliefs and principles. Four principals described the importance of "carrying the trust," as one expressed it, and another captured a shared theme by saying that the job is a continual "conversation about how life should be lived."

Management is not leadership

As one principal noted, management is not leadership (Branson & Gross, 2014; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009) in a learning environment and, while all acknowledged their roles as managers, none included the 'corporate' aspect of their school practice as an important part of ethical leadership. Engagement with regulations and formal requirements was seen as necessary but 'technical,' and applying them in the school context must take account of the direct and continual interaction with individuals.

Two were specific in saying that the department focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes was not a significant accountability for them; they are accountable for department policies "but not numbers." Supporting teachers to be better in their instructional practice and provision for individual learning generally were more important. Others did not directly mention improving student learning data as important but supporting teachers to improve their instructional practice was a priority for all because it is a means to achieving long term ethical purposes.

The nature of the relationships is a significant determinant of their ethical leadership

For all of them ethical leadership is a practice rather than a role and as a practice it is a continuous process of pragmatic, situational decision making with others, one of taking account of balancing rights, competing interests, and considering consequences. This process is examined further in the ethical dilemmas section and it is based on perceptions of leadership shared by all participating principals.

Principal authority more informal than formal

They all held the view that authority as principal is more often informal rather than formal, particularly in the most important practice of school cultural shift, developing agreements about school direction and "high leverage" teaching practice and individual teacher improvement. All of these were seen as the most important work because they directly affect the student learning.

These aspects of leadership were seen as ethical for two reasons. First, they involved potential change in the professional practice of teachers and therefore required respectful engagement and evidence based dialogue that challenges people intellectually and emotionally. This interpretation of caring for others is an ethical process because of the challenge and potential risk to individual wellbeing and the potential impact on student learning because "there is no one right answer" and no certainty that agreed action is best.

Actions are ethical interpretation of authority

Secondly, all of these processes are an ethical interpretation of authority. Each of the principals described in their own way that shared responsibility for the everyday school culture and decisions about teaching and student management is ethically important. Two stated the view implied by all that people in the school should do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, not because they say so, "as the boss." While they all accept their formal accountability and state a willingness to make decisions when that was appropriate, in the core business of student learning and safety, every member of staff has a different role but a responsibility that is theirs. As one expressed it, "it's not me, it's us as a group" and another gestured to the principal's chair and observed that nothing important can change if everyone expects it all come from there.

> Shared learning and decision making are the legitimate basis for leadership work.

All participants used the agreements developed through shared learning and decision making as the legitimate basis for leadership work with staff that sometimes requires changes in practice. Two were specific in their view that it would not be ethical to require changes in pedagogical practice based on their personal professional views of best practice, and all noted the importance of developing the agreements as both an effective change strategy and an ethical practice because it treated teachers as professionals. That view did not mean that the principals would not take direct action with staff when other ethical principles were not being followed. All noted examples of their intervention when teacher behaviour was not fair, inclusive, caring, or respectful towards students in their view.

5. Principles evident in principals' responses to ethical dilemmas

The main ingredients in ethical dilemmas have been identified above; the social nature of schools, competing important ethical purposes, competing interests of different individuals and groups, and the uncertainty about what constitutes best practice. It was in the observations about how they respond to ethical dilemmas that all the participants described their lived experience of schools as open complex systems, "a shared space" of diverse needs and experiences. They all described how

important it was to understand the lives of students, families and staff in their community and the reality of “the back story and the back story.”

Individual student learning: ultimately but not immediately first

While individual student learning must ultimately come first for all participants, that priority was sometimes a longer term aim than the clear priority in the short term. Safety of staff and students was the first priority and the rights of the majority were more important than those of individuals, when individual behaviour risked the rights and safety of others. These dilemmas were focussed around removal of individuals from classes and the school and all principals acknowledged that those suspended might then be at risk themselves.

This ethical tension included three common elements. It was important to keep the suspended student and their family engaged with the school and to plan a way forward. Increasing the “tolerance” or capacity to keep all students in the school was a priority for all principals. This may be seen as another application of learning as an ethical practice with an ethical purpose. While some behaviour was seen as requiring a clear consequence, behaviours that risked the learning and safety of others needed to be understood as a consequence of inadequate internal systems or the result of insufficient understanding, skill levels, or resourcing. These elements can be classified as complicated system aspects of schools as a system. While these elements may not change an immediate consequence, all principals described their importance as part of their plan for improving conditions for learning.

Four principals described how inflexible Department of Education systems and inadequate collaboration with other agencies often led to circumstances beyond the control of the school that in turn resulted in behaviour that could not be accommodated by the school. There were also examples where such collaboration provided a combined capacity that supported children with highly challenging behaviours to stay in school and these were seen as positive evidence of the potential for agency and community collaboration. The importance of the whole school community, relevant agencies, and flexible resources working together with the child and their family, “at the centre” was seen by all as ethical practice because it puts the

individual child first and offers the most effective way of achieving the school's moral purpose.

Part C: Synthesis of themes across all questions

The themes and findings from the combined research of the criteriological inquiry, the ethical leadership literature review and the narrative inquiry into principals' responses to ethical dilemmas are presented in two ways in this section; descriptive headings that serve as organisers of the findings discussed in this chapter and a diagrammatic model.

This section addresses the overall research question:

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

It explores findings about participant principal practice and understanding from the perspective of the literature review and Research Question 1 findings, and the interview data from the narrative inquiry, presented in the Research Question 2 findings. These are specific questions designed as tools to explore the larger research question of how school principals respond to ethical dilemmas. The beliefs and practices identified as ethical in the literature and in the interview data both guide this overall inquiry question, and the more specific questions. The questions are:

RQ 1. ***What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?***

RQ 2. ***How are principals' approaches to ethical decision making informed by their perceptions of the organisational characteristics of their schools?***

> ***a. How do principals respond to ethical dilemmas?***
>
> ***b. How do principals understand ethical school leadership?***
>
> ***c. How does their practice represent their understanding of schools as complex systems?***

This section concludes with a diagrammatic model of how the participating principals understand their ethical leadership practice. The discussion leading to the model integrates all of the elements of the research and offers seven organisers for the combined synthesis of the criteriological inquiry, the literature review and the

interviews. The findings have been presented to address the separate research questions and this section weaves the threads together.

The overall themes of principals' responses to ethical dilemmas in schools as complex systems

The following organisers group findings from the interview data, the criteriological inquiry, and the literature review of ethical leadership literature. They emerged from looking at all of these findings and grouping in them ways that made useful connections across all of the theory and data. These are identified as organisers rather than themes. Some are themes describing agreed perceptions, and others are descriptors that group evidence in order to then identify themes or address a shared focus.

The seven organisers are:

1. Complexity, ethics and leadership: alignments and consequences describes a grouping of the interview data under the three most important elements of the research questions.
2. Complicated system thinking: schools and policies emphasises the disconnect between the system thinking evident in school and education system policies and the evidence in the findings of how the principals described their work.
3. Principals' responses and leadership theories and ethical priorities in the literature describes some theory from the literature that is aligned to interview data findings
4. Adaptive leadership is examined in the literature review and is consistent with the findings that describe how principals understand their leadership.
5. Principals' responses and ethics as described in school leadership literature. This organiser summarizes a theme in the findings and discussion and identifies similarities in and differences between the principals' ethical priorities and the ethics literature.
6. Ethical school leadership as described in school leadership literature concentrates specifically on the ethics of leadership.
7. Mismatches with some inquiry questions. This organiser identifies some potential areas for research not represented in interview responses.

1. Complexity, ethics and leadership: alignments and consequences

The argument that schools are complex adaptive social systems with some complicated system elements has been emphasised in this chapter. The emphasis here is on the importance and relevance of schools as complex systems as the mental model through which one understands the school and the evidence in the findings that the principals understand their schools as complex systems in which all decisions are ethical.

Three threads of alignment in the findings connect complexity theory, the role of ethics and the nature of the leadership that is described by the participating principals. They are significant features of both complicated systems and complex systems in which people work together. The themes from the interview data can be grouped as:

- The nature of authority and power
- The ownership of accountability
- The importance of ethical choices.

This investigation suggests that the mental models held by individuals and represented in the interview data and the texts include positions about these three shared elements of organised human social structures. In this case, *social* identifies that people interact with each other to make decisions, take actions and share their lives. Identifying the dominant system model matters because the assumptions about how the system works are accompanied by beliefs about these three characteristics. This argument is proposed and expanded in Chapter 2 Part A.

The influence and importance of this relationship is largely unrecognised in the literature and Chapter 2 examines examples of mismatches and misunderstandings. The participating principals do not provide evidence of mismatch between their beliefs about how the school as a system works and how they practice. Rather, there is close alignment as identified in the first part of this chapter. They do however express frustration about a lack of flexible and effective collaboration with diverse service providers because of their competing priorities and incompatible organisational structures and formal roles.

While they practice leadership with a lived sense of being part of a complex system, the intellectual models dominating literature, policy and standards is one of

schools as complicated systems. Schools however, are largely complex systems and the unconscious use of the wrong model has consequences largely unidentified or examined in research. The principals describe key elements of complexity in their lived experience; unclear boundaries, the powerful influence of informal authority, self-organising staff who create their own meanings, and events that are dilemmas because they are unique combinations of circumstances with unknown solutions. In interview, principals spoke in terms of active engagement with others as partners and the powerful influence of informal authority. Principals know they live in a complex system where the complexity continually contributes to the normal environment of ethical dilemmas. Most importantly, they demonstrated awareness that problems are complex, and they require actions based on what matters most in the particular circumstances. The problems demand ethical choices and the principals are cognizant of that.

The three dot pointed key features are seen quite differently depending on the system thinking through which they are interpreted. The unconscious complexity model for the principals includes the reality of informal authority in influencing decisions and every day actions, and the power of social media. of networks of opinion. These are evident when they describe the importance of relationships and the need for diverse engagement of agents in decision-making. They describe the importance of everyone accepting personal accountability for school culture, successful learning and community wellbeing. Crucially, they see the application of ethical principles as business as usual in responding to circumstances that are constantly unique.

2. Complicated system thinking: schools and policies

The principals noted that data, rules and technical skills have their place as resources in responding to issues arising in a fundamentally ethical environment. Their thinking of schools as complicated systems includes reliance on technical expertise, known solutions, formal authority, principal as the accountable officer, linear consequences, and reliance on data and controlled processes. The section *relationships with formal decision-makers and line managers* is an example. This mechanical mental model of human systems has dominated for 100’s of years and

while there are elements of these features in schools, they are not the features the principals see as most important in understanding and acting in their work.

The AITSL standards for principals and the leadership profiles (AITSL, 2015) is an important example of a tendency in literature and policies to espouse the significance of ethics and ethical leadership in general terms without building on that in the body of the work. Chapter 2 explores how a complicated system model also unconsciously dominates literature and policy. This investigation suggests that the Standards and Profiles describe principals who must be in control and personally accountable. Realities of informal power and authority, the fuzzy boundaries of school, and the unpredictability of people and events are not evident. Words used in the principal's professional practices lens pages of the Profiles include "create," "embed," "promote," and "align" (pp. 15-19). Words such adaption and negotiation are not used.

"Complexity, challenging and changing environment" (p. 6) is acknowledged in introductory comments but not evidenced in the profile descriptors where the principal uses evidence, gives feedback, and controls from the top by being skilled in deliberate strategies. Distributed leadership and collaboration are identified as choices in the repertoire of a principal's methodology rather than realities of complex systems already present in school culture. The Standards do expect principals to "challenge the status quo and seek continuous improvement" (p. 8) but the profiles do not expand on that expectation. The ethical priorities specifically identified in the Standards are equity and excellence and these are not expanded in the detailed profiles, nor is there any description of what they may look like. The "best interests of the community" (p. 21) is the overarching purpose of schools and, while the technical aspects of leadership are described in detail, no space is given to the implication of this ethical priority on leadership actions.

3. Principals' responses and leadership theories, and ethical priorities in the literature

Some contemporary theories of school leadership explored in the literature review align more closely than others with the principals' reflections as described in the findings. Daniel Murphy, a writer on ethical school leadership, is one who does

match the findings in his view that ethical judgment in situations of moral complexity are best made in the situation. Murphy (2013) does not make explicit use of complexity theory but he examines the importance of diverse relationships with the school's community and the nature of ethical dilemmas as competing multiple priorities. They are both strong themes in the findings. His position that "ethical principles can often usefully be held in balance, not forced to compete" (p. 80) would resonate with the principals if they knew of his work. He also offers a range of specific approaches to problem solving and working with others that contribute to the important point that leadership in complexity can and must be deliberate and skilled. This approach to leadership is compatible with complex system principles.

Two aspects of his comprehensive examination of principal practice in complexity are particularly relevant to this investigation's findings. One is the concept of leadership as a practice and the other is adaptive leadership and they are included in the findings for RQ 2 (a), *how do principals understand ethical school leadership.?* He addresses leadership as a practice directly. He examines the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and gives it an importance that is also evident in this investigation. He describes MacIntyre's concept of a practice as the work people do with "practices" that are the "coherent forms of socially established co-operative human activity" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 175). These can provide "goods" external to the activity of schools, narrowly defined, such as a better community and increased personal choices of students as described by the principals. More importantly, they can only be achieved by the internal goods "which promote human flourishing" (p. 81). Murphy's eloquent application of MacIntryre's concept resonates with the reflections of the principals on their motivations and beliefs. For example, learning is both an internal good and a right in itself and an external good as a means to flourishing. For the principals, this good applies to everyone in the school system – children, staff, families and community.

While this concept of leadership as practice appears to closely match the work of school leadership as an ethical purpose in a complex system, other leadership theories interpret leadership largely in the complicated model of roles and responsibilities. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), examined in the literature review, locate their thinking directly in the title as ethical leadership through the theoretical perspectives of complex dilemmas. Their model (p. 26) is dominated by formal

standards and codes and the construct of ‘professional’ that is described in part as the need to “take into account a variety of models, not simply one or two” because “dilemmas in educational institutions can be complicated” (p. 7).

They also examine the clashing of codes between personal and individual ethics and codes and formal codes and employer requirements. Shapiro and Gross (2013) also identify this clash as a source of ethical dilemma and a significant challenge to principals, along with “a moral and spirit crisis” (p. 29) in society. While Murphy’s treatment of the work of principals resonates with the interview data, significant elements of the representations of Shapiro, Stefkovich and Gross do not.

4. Adaptive Leadership

The literature review of Chapter 2 and the criteriological inquiry include some exploration of the leadership theories and styles that best represent ethical practice in the complexity of the school. It notes that school leadership literature pays little attention to leadership theory outside the world of education research that tends to look habitually inward; exceptions include the thinking of Cranston (2017), Ehrich et al., (2015), and Gough (2012). Heifetz’ work on adaptive leadership is overlooked and its relevance to school leadership is yet to be acknowledged.

This concept of adaptive leadership is explored in the criteriological inquiry for its relevance to schools and resonates strongly with the experiences described by all participating principals. Heifetz identifies discontinuity, unpredictability and dissonance as a normal state in organisations that needs to be embraced. Constant adaption is a feature of effective organisation and disequilibrium is a resource for improvement. This mental model is in contrast to turbulence theory (Gross, 2014), an example of a metaphor that represents a view of uncertainty and tension as an “external pressure” that the school can be “shielded” from (p. 44) by the principal. This example of the assumptions about systems that drive notions of effective leadership is examined in the section above, *turbulence and disequilibrium: Shapiro and Gross vs Heifetz,* Chapter 2. It highlights the themes of assumptions driving misinterpretations of schools as systems and the mismatch between principals’ daily experience and some of the leadership literature.

5. Principals' responses and ethics and school leadership literature

School plans and policy documents often state that schools are fundamentally about moral/ ethical purposes and the participating principals describe schools' purposes in terms of ethical priorities. However, general education leadership literature does not always acknowledge that foundational importance. The subset of school leadership literature that concentrates on ethical leadership pays more attention to ethical practice. Some claim that "only ethical leadership is actual leadership" (Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 440), although that is not a widely held explicit view. The participating principals' view is that schools are essentially ethical, and leadership involves making choices and facilitating decision-making processes within that environment. These choices are between ethical priorities and the processes need to model processes that are ethical.

The literature review notes that the majority of leadership literature includes a dimension of ethics within a landscape of leadership skills and knowledge and some have a section or perhaps a chapter on ethics. More often than not, texts do not examine the ethical choice making and dilemmas at the centre of any style of leadership you care to mention; transformational, distributed system, (Hopkins, 2009), or the approach that Davies (Davies & Brundrett, 2010) describes as successful. The ubiquitous presence of ethical choices and the importance of modelling of ethical principles as expressed by the participants is not widely reflected in the school leadership literature. The ethical nature of schools is so deeply important that a strong case can be made for focus on the cultivation of ethical schools as a common priority theme across education departments and in professional learning.

Starratt is one long standing writer who explores with conviction the fundamental importance of "cultivating an ethical school", which is the title of his 2012 text. He provides a detailed case for "the moral character of learning" (p. 92) and describes the essentials for an ethical school. The profound thinking in this work is not evident in current policies about the purposes of schooling. The principals who believe from their own experience that schools are fundamentally ethical may find clarification and direction in his work that is not available elsewhere.

6. Ethical school leadership as described in school leadership literature

For the participating principals, there is a shared normative view of ethical purposes and practice in that they are assumed to be the uncontroversial, normal, and correct positions to take. The agreed ethical purpose is the learning of individuals. The reasons for that purpose congregate around students leading fulfilling lives and thereby having a positive effect on their community. This positive effect includes several specific social justice aspects such as decreased physical and emotional trauma and poverty and improving the social capital of the community.

These purposes appear unremarkable in themselves. There is some significance when they are considered in the context of the literature review and the interview findings of RQ I and 2. The ethical priorities and the leadership practices the participants choose to describe when reflecting on how they respond to ethical dilemmas have a varied alignment with the school leadership literature.

The principals all identify safety, learning, care, respect, rights and responsibilities and some specifically identify justice and equity. These match those identified in the literature and discussed in the literature review. The principals' narratives capture a shared view of longer term purposes such as improving students' opportunities for, and capacity to attain, a life that is fulfilling. They also see their work as improving the wellbeing of the school community. One was explicit about a conscious focus on activism for addressing broader issues of inequality. There was not an awareness of the philosophical heritage of these concepts nor did any express a need to understand the concepts as theoretical constructs.

There are some differences between the ways the principals understood these concepts and some common positions in the literature. The absence of the ethic of 'critique' and a lack of a sense of urgency about the importance of democratic leadership are clear differences. Critique as the conscious action of principals to address societies "(in) justices" through a role as "educator-citizens" (Bogoth & Shields, 2014, p. 5) is not identified in their responses. They did not see their work or their ethical responsibility as initiating social and political action. They saw their work within the school as strongly connected to the school families and the community. The ethical dilemmas described in the narratives and the interview findings all describe a school based focus highly influenced by social circumstances.

There is no separation between school leadership engaged in modelling the ethical priorities and an activist role outside the school. Perhaps this is another example of systems thinking in action whereby the principals do not see a separation between the school and its community, while some of the theorists see a separation and therefore an ethical gap if the principal is not an activist outside the school.

Connected to this characterization of ethical leadership is the importance of democratic leadership explicitly examined in several texts, particularly in Gross and Shapiro (2016) and explored in the democratic leadership section of the literature review. The principals do not see themselves as agents of change explicitly outside the school but recognize that they contribute from within through a flow on effect that may include some elements of "inspiring truly democratic ethical participatory cultures" (Gross & Shapiro, 2016, p. 3). A major difference between that text and the principals' view is the compatibility between the principals' views and those of the Department of Education's stated values and vision. Their relationships with the organization that employs them is not characterized as a struggle to resist business metaphors and restrictive central interventions that are not to be trusted. The need expressed by the principals to reform schools focused on flexible and coherent collaboration with service providers; another feature of effective complex systems not currently working properly.

7. Mismatches with some inquiry questions

This researcher's early thinking about issues that may arise in the study of principals' responses to ethical dilemmas included tensions between the ethics of the private and the professional self and between autonomy as the school principal and accountability as an employee of a government agency. A specific relevance of these tensions was the degree to which they may affect mental wellbeing and efficacy. Bogoth and Shields (2014) and Branson and Gross (2014) expect both tensions to occur. The literature review explores their views about resistance to central authority as an ethical responsibility of principals, and the pre-eminence of a moral and "universal self" (Branson & Gross, 2014, p. 217) over a public employee self. These issues were not seen as challenging tensions worth mentioning by five of the six participating principals. This study does not claim to generalize its findings and furthermore extensive research into this area would be valuable.

A model: A principals' model of ethical leadership practice

This model is an illustration of the key findings and their relationships across both research questions. It combines all the findings in a representation of how the participating principals understand principalship.

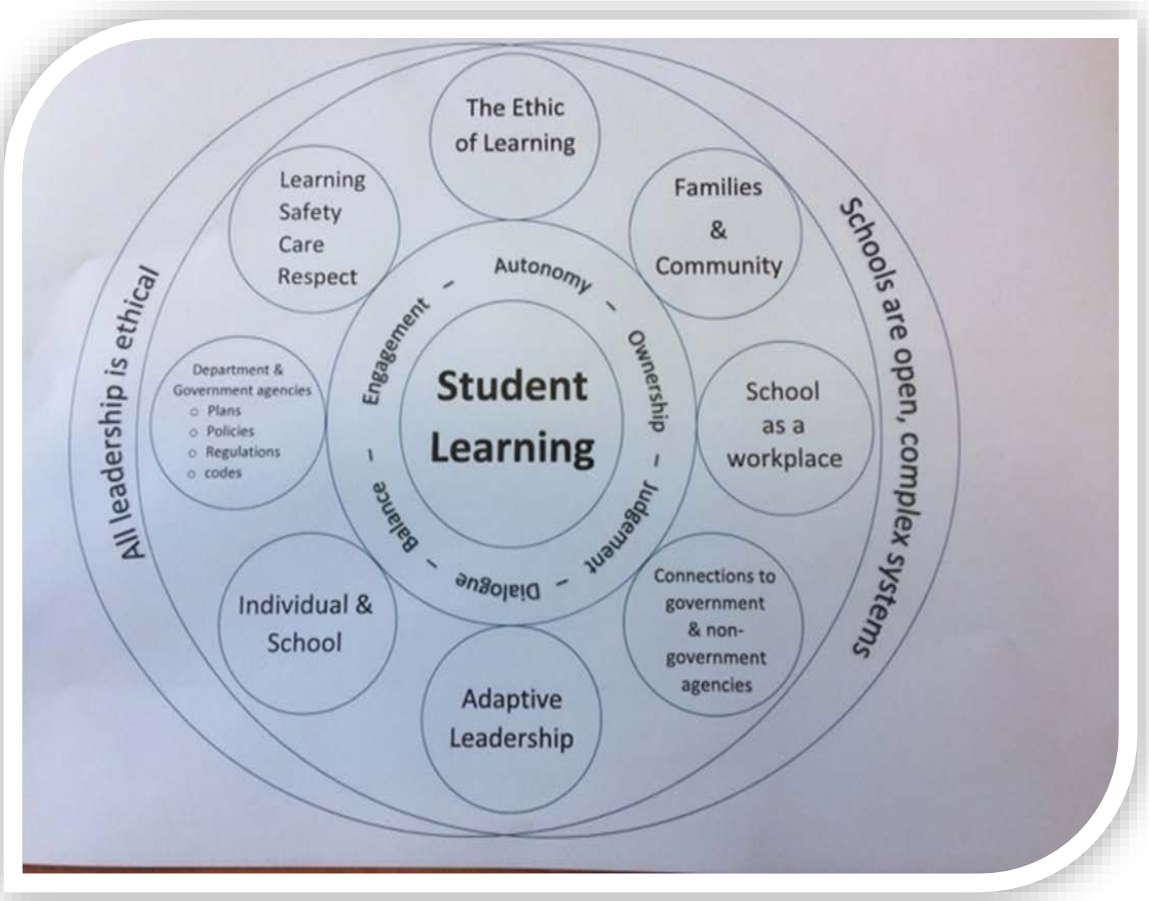

Figure 4. *A Model: A Principals' Model of Ethical Leadership Practice.*

Figure 4 concentrates on the practice of ethical leadership rather than its purposes. This represents both the focus on responses to dilemmas and the choices of the principals to emphasise what they did that represented their priorities rather than beliefs in the abstract. Student learning is the unequivocal centre of the model and identified in the discussion as one of the two dominant key findings, together with the closely associated view of learning as an ethic driving both purpose and practice. The latter is a priority in its own right and together are main drivers for action and

influences all other elements of the model. The next ring identifies the practices and principles that are most valued as features of ethical practice and they are also derived from findings about both research questions.

The identification of schools as open complex systems as the title of the right hand side is confirmation of the close alignment between the criteriological inquiry finding and the principals' understanding of what a school is and how it works as a system. Adaptive leadership, identified as a balance to the ethic of learning, is interpreted in the findings for RQ2 as leadership in action and includes important elements of the school as an open complex system; no clear boundaries, diverse people to care for and work with and multiple stakeholders with formal and informal power and influence. The right hand side elements also recognise the importance of the formal rules and structures of an organisation that is a government agency and the implications of a school as a place of paid employment.

The left hand side represents the competing ethical priorities at play within the school through the relationships between the individual, families, community, and government. These priorities come from the interview data and not the literature reviewed. All leadership is ethical, the title of the left hand side, is another key finding from the interview data and highlights the situational, circumstantial nature of the ethical choices for action.

Summary of principal reflections

The principals responded to the ethical dilemmas they identified with a practical knowledge of several key characteristics of open complex social systems. Their actions were not directed by a conscious knowledge or application of systems theory or a knowledge of complexity leadership. There was little evidence that a theoretical construct of how schools work as systems was influential. The confluence of two influences framed their responses. One was the ethical purposes and decision-making that were most important to them, and the second was their practical knowledge of the multiple relationships, the highly variable factors and the unique circumstances of every situation. During the interview process most identified that ethical dilemmas in schools occur in, and because of, that complexity; what several called the "learning space" or similar.

For all of them, ethical leadership consisted of making choices for action, often in the moment and always involving decisions that affected individuals. There was also little evidence of being consciously influenced either by ethical theory, leadership theory, or by professional codes or standards. Department of Education requirements and formal procedures were seen as legitimate, technical aspects of management rather than contributors to complexity.

The ethical purposes of school identified in the findings are consistent with some of the themes in the ethical leadership literature in that care, rights and responsibility are shared priorities. There are also different perspectives and priorities. They may be due to the unequivocal focus on leadership *in* the school without a strong sense of ethical responsibility for broad social or political critique or explicit social justice leadership located directly in the community. Justice as a consequence of their school principal practice was commonly identified, as was the view that many aspects of the students' life were beyond their control and the best opportunity for school influence was to improve learning, support families, and improve community self-respect through the quality of the school.

Literature and Policy

While the principals understand schools as fundamentally ethical in their purpose, school leadership literature and government policies do not necessarily demonstrate that belief. The ethical nature of schools and school leadership may be noted in the texts and policies but is often only superficially included in examinations and descriptions of leadership practice.

The principals, who identify key characteristics of complex adaptive social systems in the dilemmas, acknowledge the pervasive presence of ethical dilemmas. The literature and policies most often apply an unexamined mental model of schools as open complicated systems. This inaccurate conceptualization generates descriptions of leadership of schools that is a mismatch of the reality of school leadership. That misunderstanding includes largely overlooking the importance of, and influence over, the practice of ethical choice work in principal practice. The texts and policies designed to guide and inform school leadership that demonstrate this connect from principals' lived experience are of limited value.

Chapter 6. Conclusions and Implications

Overview

The conclusions and implications in this chapter flow from the research findings and include a brief recap of the findings and discussion developed through the thesis. The discussion in this chapter builds particularly on the synthesis of the overall research findings in Part C, Chapter 5. These conclusions and implications are developed from the three parts of the investigation of the broad research question:

How do school principals respond to the ethical dilemmas that arise in their schools?

The first part was a criteriological inquiry into the nature of schools as systems, driven by RQ 1:

What are the organisational characteristics of schools as systems?

This inquiry demonstrated that schools are complex opens systems, rather than complicated ones. The evidence from the inquiry into systems theory and system leadership literature led to the development of the Open Systems Criteria Framework. The framework identified significant differences between the two mental models of schools as systems. Consequences and implications of the differences were considered throughout the research because of their relevance to each of the research questions.

A significant characteristic of complex systems is that they deal with wicked problems (Weick, 1995) that are always ethical dilemmas. Ethical dilemmas are, therefore, a normal part of schools and schools are fundamentally ethical in their purpose and nature (Starratt, 2005, 2014). The criteriological inquiry and the literature review established the link between schools as complex systems and the natural and constant presence of ethical dilemmas. The inquiry resulted in the term complex adaptive social systems as a description of schools.

The literature review, the second part of the investigation, demonstrated that school leadership literature does not acknowledge the importance of systems concepts on which the observations are based. The literature largely and unconsciously applies largely complicated system characteristics to schools. For example, organisational theory is applied to the concept of distributed leadership

(Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane 2008), without consideration of the complex systems leadership theory (Hazy et al., 2007). Consequently, leadership attributes and decision-making processes are often not compatible with the nature of schools as complex systems. The constancy of ethical dilemmas is rarely acknowledged and the conceptualization of power and authority in the literature does not align with the demonstrated importance of the natural features of complex systems, including the influence of informal authority, self-organisation, and the need for constant adaption.

Principals' thinking about their practice was the third source of research data, required to address RQ 2 and its sub-questions. Six principals participated in the interviews and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview data demonstrated that the six participants practice leadership in ways consistent with the characteristics of complex adaptive social systems. They see all leadership as primarily ethical, both by choice and because of their lived everyday experience in school life. Leadership, by their definition, is an ethical process. While there are important elements of technical problem solving and the application of formal authority, ethical dilemmas requiring collaboration with diverse stakeholders dominate the everyday culture. The principals share the belief that the short and long purposes of schools are ethical, citing living a fulfilling life, improved life opportunities for individuals, and improved communities as dominant ethical principles and aspirations.

Student learning is the fundamental and immediate purpose of schooling. Values such as justice, care, safety, and rights have independent worth, and are often described as means to achieve effective learning. Learning is an ethic in itself. The principals see learning as having intrinsic value for its own sake and leadership as a practice founded on the belief that engaging everyone as active learners is the key to effective decision-making and achieving the school's purposes.

They see their work as a practice rather than a role (MacIntrye, 2007). This practice includes understanding and behaviour that is consistent with complex systems theory that is neither evident, nor described, in much contemporary school leadership literature. Adaptive responses to repeating unique circumstances are essential for them, rather than the application of regulations and standard procedures. The principals consider that ethical and effective leadership requires them to engage

with every person with a stake in a dilemma and to demonstrate care and respect for all.

Future directions for research

The influence of specific factors affecting how principals respond to ethical dilemmas would enrich the findings of this study. The influence of gender, qualifications, professional training and personally held ethical beliefs, for example, may be valuable and achievable in an expanded study including a larger number of participants and the addition of structured surveys, school-based observations and members of school communities in addition to the principal.

Shared professional learning about ethical concepts and philosophical frameworks relevant to the unique nature of schools as complex adaptive social systems, and how that understanding influences responses to ethical dilemmas, would be valuable research. The reasons for lack of comment by participants about philosophical frameworks was outside the scope of this study and there is no interview data enabling discussion about it. However, the importance of an explicit focus on the cultivation of ethical schools (Starratt, 2012) is a conclusion of this research, and further specific study of that cultivation would productively include how school communities understand and use philosophical frameworks and tools.

Implications

This research identifies a need to revisit tradition and acknowledge the new. The tradition is the deep foundations of philosophy on which contemporary ethical leadership literature is unconsciously based, and the new is the complexity thinking largely ignored in the school leadership literature.

There are at least three areas for further research and professional learning support for school and education leaders: ethical leadership, systems thinking, and re-imaging schools. There is a need to find out more about what the people in schools are experiencing, and to then represent and examine that in the leadership literature. This approach may balance the dominance of theoretical constructs currently driving much of the ethical leadership literature. A contemporary understanding of schools as they operate and the consequent culture and leadership as they currently operate are evidence based perspectives required as a foundation for

policies and standards, and for relevant academic research. The re-imaging how schools might evolve requires a critical examination of the theoretical models that much of the literature and leadership programs are based. Continuing to explore innovations based on assumed and inaccurate system models may be a cause of ineffective efforts for improvement.

Ethical Leadership

The principals acknowledge the fundamentally ethical nature of schools and school leadership. This lived reality and the challenges of responding to ethical dilemmas are important possibilities for academic research and writing and the design and provision of professional learning. Inspiring writing, relevant theory, and exemplar examples for supporting leadership learning already exist as strong foundations for a necessary resurgence. Although not currently evident in policies and professional learning, the ethical nature of schools, so eloquently explored by Starratt, is so deeply important that a strong case can be made for the focus on the cultivation of ethical schools (Starratt, 2012) as a theme across public education and in professional learning.

A rigorous critique of ethical school leadership appears warranted. This thesis invests in exploring the contemporary literature and writers and raises some challenges. One is that the theoretical and philosophical rationales that appear to be largely accepted and used by a few writers on ethical leadership appear to stand without deep analysis from other education writers and researchers. That critique might include the perspectives of the tradition of deep thinking that has gone before and would challenge some contemporary constructs of, for example, integrity and intuition. New perspectives, new voices, and reconnection with intellectual traditions are required.

The other challenge is the lack of relevance the literature has to principals applying ethical practice in their everyday lives. There is an opportunity to align the academic research and literature to contemporary practices of principal leadership and thereby contribute to some profound ethical purposes. This research should engage school leaders and relevant members of the school community as partners in research that they see as practically valuable to their own practice.

The *future direction for research* section notes the absence of philosophers' thinking in participant reflections on their own understanding of ethical practice, and the possible relationship with the same absence in school leadership literature. This lack of acknowledgement is described in the section *contemporary ethical school leadership theories* in the literature review. While the participants did not describe knowledge of the leadership literature either, there may be common reasons for both the principals and many of the theorists giving little regard to the long standing traditional foundations of ethical thinking.

System thinking

Most of the literature reviewed and the policy documents are based on a worldview of schools as systems that does not represent reality. There is a small but eloquent and convincing body of research and writing within education research that is available as a resource for describing the significant acknowledgment that is needed in understanding schools. There is also a need for school leadership literature to look outward to the research into the many organisations with complexity system similarities to schools. People in schools are practising in systems largely not recognised nor understood in the literature or in the professional learning support currently available in Australia.

There is also a contemporary and respected focus on the concept of distributed leadership that is a vehicle for seeing schools as something other than bureaucratic, mechanical systems. There similarities and significant differences between the complex adaptive system characteristics and the models that have some similarities. These tend to be based on organisational theory rather than complex systems leadership theory. Research and dialogue about their relative merits as best fit paradigms of what schools really are would be useful. That dialogue should include analysis of the relative merits and consequences of their use in research, and the conceptual frameworks through which schools are explored in academic papers. One result could be school leadership research designed with the features of both explicitly in mind.

Re-imaging schools

This thesis has described the daily lives of schools as human systems inextricably linked to diverse organisations and influenced by myriad beliefs and needs. Literature, policy and professional learning do not demonstrate understanding of that complex reality. The principals have captured the highly challenging circumstances created by this complex social system and they described their ways of working in that environment. There is an urgent need for further research into these ways of working ethically in complex systems and the consequences of continuing to work within mental maps that no longer fit the real geography.

A most important and exciting research opportunity is inquiry into emerging models of working in this complexity. These are being applied in practice and research, and commentary that contribute to the re-imagining of schools away from an industrial model of control and limited purpose and towards a coherent deliberate response to what schools have become and are becoming.

Appendices

Appendix A

Question schedule

The guiding questions and possible sub-questions, depending on individual responses are included here.

1. Please recall an ethical dilemma to which you have responded in your role as principal. Could you describe the issue and your response?

Sub questions and prompts as required:

What made it an ethical dilemma for you?
What were some of your reasons for that choice of action?
What were some of the tensions, consequences, arising from the example?
What were the pressures, who cared about the issue?
How do you decide to act in the end?

The participant's response during the detailed example may enable the following questions to be answered during that response or it may be necessary to ask them specifically.

2. What guiding principles are most important for you as you respond to ethical dilemmas?

Prompts: what ethical principles do you consider and how might you prioritize them – fairness, justice, equity, care, individual rights, well-being of the majority, learning improvement for example.

3. How do you see the matches and tensions between your personal ethical views and those of the system you work in, the colleagues you work with in this school, the wider school community?

4. What actions to do usually take in making deciding how to respond to and ethical dilemma?

a. With whom do you consult?
b. What information is it important for you to collect and how do you go about that?
c. What are the common steps you take in responding and deciding what actions to take?
d. Are there some priorities that you usually keep in mind as you are working through the issue?

5. How do the formal rules and the organisational structures of the school and the wider system influence how you respond?

a. Formal and informal authority and influence of individuals.
b. Decision making and consultation systems in and outside of the school

Appendix B

Research Administration

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School Principal Responses to Ethical Dilemmas

Participant Information Sheet

This Information Sheet is intended for school principals considering participation in the interviews exploring how they respond to ethical dilemmas that have arisen in their school.

Invitation

This is an invitation for you to consider participating in my research. This Information Sheet outlines the purposes of the study and the potential benefits to you and principals generally. As a mature student with decades of experience as a school principal and senior officer in a variety of roles, I am committed to contributing to a better understanding how principals respond to ethical dilemmas by exploring the actual professional experiences of practicing principals.

I am currently a student researcher conducting this study as partial fulfilment of a Doctorate of Education through the School of Education of University of Tasmania. My supervisors are Dr. David Moltow, Lecturer in the School of Education and Professor Neil Cranston, School of Education, both at the University of Tasmania.

What is the purpose of this study?

This research explores the range of ways in which school principals respond to ethical dilemmas that arise in schools and pays particular attention to some factors that may influence that response. These factors include the relationships between the professional ethics required of them by their employer and regulations, the particular school context and their personal ethics. The research does not impose a definition of what is ethical on the interview process and pays attention to how principals understand ethical practice and ethical principles.

An important part of the study is to explore how principals see their schools as systems and how that understanding affects their decision making and their approaches to leadership.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate because of your willingness to reflect on your professional practice and experiences. Also, I am looking for a range of experience and perspectives that include gender, principal experience and types of school. There is little research available in my area of study and a range of contributions will provide foundational data for further study

What will I be asked to do?

You are being asked to participate in two interviews of between 45 minutes and an hour. The interviews are semi-structured and open ended. In the first interview I have some invitational questions that address broad areas of focus that give you an opportunity to reflect as you wish. I will request more reflection and clarification depending on the on your responses. The second interview will take place after I have identified themes from the first interview round. The questions in the second interview will invite you to reflect on aspects of your own first interview and on the themes established across all of the first round interviews.

The questions in the first round interviews will invite you to:

Describe an ethical dilemma and how you responded to it over time

Reflect on what makes it an ‘ethical’ dilemma for you

Consider any compatibilities and tensions you experience between your personal views on ethical action and those preferred by the school community and your employing agency.

Reflect on how the organization and structures of the school and the wider organization affect how you respond to ethical dilemmas.

Please note that the study is not looking for refined views about these matters, although any of those will be welcome of course. How principals really think through these aspects of their leadership work is very important in this study.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed in detail or in part depending on what emerges. Those transcripts will be shared with you for review and correction and that may prompt additional thoughts and conversations with the researcher in additional to the second interview.

Confidentiality and transparent treatment of your data is most important and strictly controlled by the ethics application process and university research protocols. They are described in the separate consent form you will be asked to sign.

The material is being collected and analysed as part of a thesis and procedures to ensure anonymity are applied. It may be that you agree to being quoted in the thesis and that would require very specific permission on your part. Following sections provide more detail about these matters.

Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?

There are gaps in the research about how responding to ethical dilemmas affects principals and little understanding of what may best support them to lead effectively over time in the day to day ethical challenges that naturally arise in schools. The purposes of this study are to contribute to that understanding, stimulate more research, design practical ways to support principals in their work, and to assist participants in their own work. Participation in the study will, hopefully, support you to reflect on your own practice and develop a deeper personal understanding about the choices you make.

Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?

An invitation to describe how you responded to an ethical issue may risk revisiting events that caused some distress. That risk can be minimized by selecting an example that you feel comfortable to use for reflection. There will be a wide range of day to day examples that serve the purposes of the interview very well without any expectation to select an example that risks emotional distress. It is important to note that other people's names should not be mentioned.

What if I change my mind during or after the study?

You are free to withdraw at any time, and you can do so without providing an explanation.

If you choose to withdraw after the first interview then the recording and any transcripts or notes will be destroyed and your contributions will not be included in any data. Withdrawal after the second interview will mean that the recordings, transcripts and identifiable notes will be destroyed. By this stage some individual data may be included in developing themes and used as evidence to make observations and it may not be possible to identify the contributions of individuals because of processes used to de-identify individuals. Data will be deleted at any time up to writing of the thesis where it is possible to identify individual contributions.

The interviews will take place between March and May 2017 and the thesis writing will commence then. At that stage the data will be anonymous and de-identified unless permission has been given to use quotations. These can be withdrawn up until the presentation of the draft in mid 2017.

What will happen to the information when this study is over?

The Consent Form describes how long data will be kept and for how long and you are asked to agree or not to the conditions. The research ethics of the University are precise and strict and I am committed, as part of approval for this research, to keep all data confidential and secure.

Your data will be transcribed by me and no one else will have access to recordings. I will discuss the progress of my research with Dr. David Moltow and Prof. Neil Cranston who are also bound by university ethics and confidentiality. Individual cases may be discussed with them only for the purposes of data analysis to identify themes.

It may be that I would like to use your data for another project. If this happens I will seek specific permission from you to do that and no data will be used in another project until this permission is obtained from you.

How will the results of the study be published?

The results of the study will be published as a thesis to satisfy the requirements of my candidature for a Doctorate of Education.

Articles may be published using the data and the findings before and after the completion of the thesis. Individuals will not be identifiable in any papers or presentations.

What if I have questions about this study?

"This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on +61 3 6226 6254 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number [Hxxxxx]."

Thank you for making the time to read this Information Sheet. I have also forwarded a Consent Form that further explains some additional details. If you would like to participate and you don't have a Consent Form, please email and I will be in touch.

Regards

Lynden Leppard

Appendix C

School Principal Responses to Ethical Dilemmas

Participant Consent Form

This form is intended to clarify for interview participants the conditions for participation in the research project and potential participants are encouraged to contact the researcher to discuss any matters by email as provided on the Information Sheet.

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves participation in two interviews of between 45 minutes to an hour approximately at times and a place mutually agreed. I understand that the interviews will be recorded and I will have the opportunity to review and correct transcripts of both interviews
5. I understand that participation involves the possibility that my involvement in the project will become known and that there is a risk that I may be identified with data included in the thesis. This risk will be minimized by the de-identification process applied by the researcher and my opportunity to review transcripts with the researcher to minimize the risk of identification.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the premises of the University of Tasmania for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed **or**

I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the premises of Tasmania for five years from the publication of the study results and will then be destroyed unless I give permission for my data to be stored in an archive.

7. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
8. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research and may be shared with the researcher's supervisor Dr. David Moltow for the purposes of data analysis
9. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant unless I agree to 10 below.

10. I agree to consider having specific quotes attributed to me and therefore I agree to be identified as a participant in the publication of the study results.

Yes ☐ No ☐

11. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.

Participant's name:

_____

Participant's signature:

_____

Date: _____

Statement by Investigator

☐ I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this participant and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name:

_____

Investigator's signature:

_____

Date: _____

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